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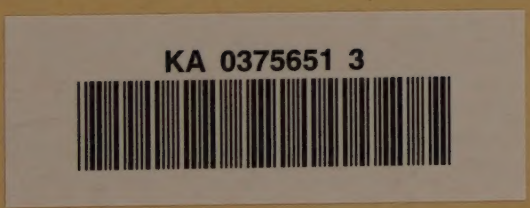

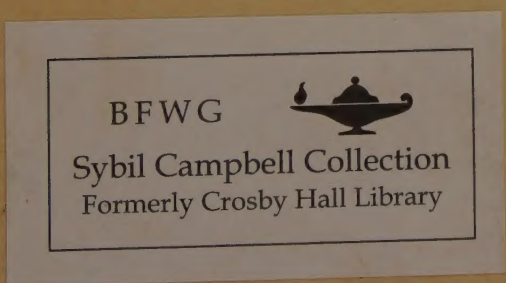

NINON DE L'ENCLOS
AND HER CENTURY

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NINON DE LENCLOS.

NINON DE L'ENCLOS

AND HER CENTURY

BY

MARY C. ROWSELL

AUTHOR OF

"THE FRIEND OF THE PEOPLE," "TRAITOR OR PATRIOT," "THORNDYKE MANOR," "MONSIEUR DE PARIS," ETC. ETC.

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS

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CHAPTER I

Birth—Parentage—"Arms and the Man"—A Vain Hope—Contraband Novels—A Change of Educational System—Ninon's Endowments—The Wrinkle—A Letter to M. de L'Enclos and What Came of it—A Glorious Time—"Troublesome Huguenots"—The Château at Loches, and a New Acquaintance—"When Greek meets Greek"—The Prisoners—"Liberty"—The Shades of Night—Vagabonds? or Two Young Gentlemen of Consequence?—Tired Out—A Dilemma—Ninon Herself Again—Consolation.

ANNE DE L'ENCLOS was born in Paris in 1615. She was the daughter of Monsieur de L'Enclos, a gentleman of Touraine, and of his wife, a member of the family of the Abra de Raconis of the Orléanois.

It would not be easy to find characteristics more diverse than those distinguishing this pair. Their union was an alliance arranged for them—a *mariage de convenance.* Diametrically opposite in temperament, Monsieur was handsome and distinguished-looking; while the face and figure of Madame were ordinary. She was constitutionally timid, and intellectually narrow, devoted to asceticism, and reserved in manner. She passed her time in seclusion, dividing it between charitable works, the reading of pious books, and attendance at Mass and the other services of the Church. Monsieur de L'Enclos, on the other hand, was a votary of

every pleasure and delightful distraction the world could afford him. Among them he counted duelling; he was a skilled swordsman, and his rapier play was of the finest. A brave and gallant soldier, he had served the royal cause during the later years of Henri IV., and so on into the reign of Louis XIII. He was a *bon vivant*, and arms and intrigue, which were as the breath of life to him, he sought after wherever the choicest opportunities of those were likely to be found.

Notwithstanding, the rule of lifelong bickering and mutual reproach attending such ill-assorted unions, would seem to be proved by its exception in the case of Ninon's parents; since no record of any such domestic strife stands against them. Bearing and forbearing, they agreed to differ, and went their several ways — Madame de L'Enclos undertaking the training and instruction of Ninon in those earliest years, in the fond hope that there would be a day when she should take the veil and become a nun. Before, however, she attained to the years of as much discretion as she ever possessed, she had arrived at the standpoint of the way she intended to take of the life before her, which was to roll into years that did not end until the dawning of the eighteenth century; and it in no way included any such intention. So sturdily opposed to it, indeed, was she, that it irresistibly suggests the possibility of her being the inspiration of the old song—"Ninon wouldn't be a nun"—

"I shan't be a nun, I won't be a nun,
I am so fond of pleasure that I *won't* be a nun!"

For Ninon was her father's child; almost all her inherited instincts were from him. The endeavours of Madame de L'Enclos failed disastrously. The monotony and rigid routine of the young girl's life repelled the bright, frank spirit, and drove it to opposite extreme, resulting in sentiments of disgust for the pious observances of her church; and taken there under compulsion day in, day out, she usually contrived to substitute some plump little volume of romance, or other light literature, at the function, for her Mass-book and breviary, to while away the tedium.

In no very long time Monsieur de L'Enclos, noting the bent of his daughter's nature, himself took over her training. He carried it on, it is scarcely necessary to say, upon a plane widely apart from the mother's. A man of refined intellect, he had studied the books and philosophy of the renaissance of literature; and before Ninon was eleven years old, while imbuing her with the love of reading such books as the essays of Montaigne and the works of Charon, he accustomed her to think and to reason for herself, an art of which she very soon became a past-mistress, the result being an ardent recognition of the law of liberty, and the Franciscan counsel of perfection: "*Fay ce qu'et voudray.*" Ninon possessed an excellent gift of tongues, cultivating it to the extent of acquiring fluently, Italian, Spanish, and English, rendered the more easy of mastery from her knowledge of Latin, which she so frequently quotes in her correspondence.

Her love of music was great; she sang well,

and was a proficient on the lute, in which her father himself, a fine player, instructed her. She conversed with facility, and doubtless took care to cultivate her natural gifts in those days when the arts of conversation and *causerie* were indispensable for shining in society, and she loved to tell a good story; but she drew a distinct line at reciting. One day when Mignard, the painter, deplored his handsome daughter's defective memory, she consoled him—"How fortunate you are," she said, "she cannot recite."

The popular acceptation of Ninon de L'Enclos' claims to celebrity would appear to be her beauty, which she retained to almost the end of her long life—a beauty that was notable; but it lay less in perfection of the contours of her face, than in the glorious freshness of her complexion, and the expression of her magnificent eyes, at once vivacious and sympathetic, gentle and modest-glancing, yet brilliant with voluptuous languor. Any defects of feature were probably those which crowned their grace—and when as in the matter of a slight wrinkle, which in advanced years she said had rudely planted itself on her forehead, the courtly comment on this of Monsieur de St Evrémond was to the effect that "Love had placed it there to nestle in." Her well-proportioned figure was a little above middle height, and her dancing was infinitely graceful.

Provincial by descent, Mademoiselle de L'Enclos was a born Parisian, in that word's every sense. Her bright eyes first opened in a small

house lying within the shadows of Notre-Dame, the old Cité itself, the heart of hearts of Paris, still at that time fair with green spaces and leafy hedgerows, though these were to endure only a few years longer. Her occasionally uttered wish that she had been born a man, hardly calls for grave consideration. The desire to don masculine garments and to ride and fence and shoot, and to indulge generally in manly pursuits, occurred to her when she was still short of twelve years old, by which time she was able to write well; and her earliest epistolary correspondence included a letter addressed to her father. It ran as follows :—

"My Very Honoured Father,—I am eleven years old. I am big and strong; but I shall certainly fall ill, if I continue to assist at three masses every day, especially on account of one performed by a great, gouty, fat canon, who takes at least twelve minutes to get through the Epistle and the Gospel, and whom the choir boys are obliged to put back again on his feet after each genuflexion. I would as soon see one of the towers of Notre Dame on the altar-steps; they would move quite as quickly, and not keep me so long from breakfast. This is not at all cheering I can tell you. In the interest of the health of your only child, it is time to put an end to this state of things. But in what manner, you will ask, and how is it to be set about? Nothing more simple. Let us suppose that instead of me, Heaven had given you a son: I should have been brought up by you, and not by my mother; already you would have begun to instruct me in arms, and mounted me on horseback, which would have much better pleased me than twiddling along the beads of a rosary to *Aves*, *Paters*, and *Credos*. The present moment is the one for me to inform you that I decide to be no longer a girl, and to become a boy.

"Will you therefore arrange to send for me to come to you, in order to give me an education suitable to my new sex? I am with respect, my very honoured father,—
Your little NINON."

This missive, which Ninon contrived to get posted without her mother's knowledge, met with her father's hearty approval. No more time was lost than it took to make her a handsome suit of clothes, of the latest mode, the one bearing the palm for grace and picturesqueness, far and away from all the fashions of men's attire, speaking for itself in the canvases of Vandyck; and Ninon stands forth in the gallant bravery of silken doublet, with large loose sleeves slashed to the shoulder; her collar a falling band of richest point lace; the short velvet cloak hanging to the shoulder; the fringed breeches meeting the wide-topped boots frilled about with fine lawn; the plumed, broad-brimmed Flemish beaver hat, well-cocked to one side upon the graceful head, covered with waves of dark hair falling to the neck; gauntleted gloves of Spanish leather; her rapier hanging from the richly-embroidered baldric crossing down from the right shoulder—a picture that thrilled the heart of Monsieur de L'Enclos with ecstasy; and when, splendidly mounted, she rode forth, ruffling it gallantly beside him, he was the proud recipient of many a compliment and encomium on the son of whose existence until now nobody had been as much as aware.

These delightful days were destined, however, to come quickly to an end. Fresh disturbances arose with the Huguenots of La Rochelle and Loudun,

and Monsieur de L'Enclos was summoned to join his regiment. Ninon would doubtless have liked of all things to go with him; but while this was impossible, she was spared the dreaded alternative of the fat canon and the three Masses a day, by her father accepting for her an invitation from his sister, the Baroness Montaigu, who lived on her estate near Loches, on the borders of the Indre. This lady, a widow and childless, had long been desirous of making the acquaintance of her young niece, and on his way north-west, Monsieur de L'Enclos left Ninon at the château. "And when we have settled these wretched Huguenots," said Monsieur de L'Enclos, as he bade her farewell, and slipped a double louis into her hands, "I will return for you."

Madame de Montaigu was a charming lady, of the same spirited, gay temperament as her brother. She received her niece with the utmost kindness, and having been initiated into the girl's whim for playing the boy, she laughingly fell in with it, and addressed her with the greatest gravity as "my pretty nephew," introducing to her, a—shall it be said?—another young gentleman, by name François de la Rochefoucauld, Prince de Marsillac, the son of her intimate friend, the Duchesse de la Rochefoucauld. The lad was a pupil at the celebrated Jesuits' College of La Flêche, founded by Henri IV., and usually spent part of his holidays at the Loches château.

A year or two older than Ninon, Marsillac was a shy and retiring boy, and at first rather shrank from his robustious new companion, who, however,

soon contrived to draw him out, putting him on his mettle by pretending to doubt his prowess with sword and rapier, and his skill generally in the noble art of fencing. She challenged him to measure weapons with her, and piqued at the idea of one younger than himself pretending to martial superiority, he cast aside his shyness, and the two falling on guard, clashed and clattered their steel in the galleries and chambers of the house, from morning till night, until the noise grew intolerable, and their weapons were taken away from them, in the fond hope of securing peace and quietness. It was, however, only partially realised; since the enforced idleness of Ninon's hands suggested the surreptitious annexing of the head forester's gun, with which she took aim at the blackbirds in the park avenues, and the young does in the forest: and then, seeking further variety, the two manned the pleasure-boat on the lake, and fared into such perilous places, that the voyages became strictly tabooed, and the boat was hidden away.

The constant *tintamarre* of the pair frequently brought its punishment; and one day, on the occasion of a too outrageous disturbance, they were locked into the library. Books they had no particular mind for that glorious sunshiny morning; still less enjoyable was the prospect of the promised dinner of dry bread and water, and they sat gloomlly gazing upon the softly-waving boughs of the trees, and up through the open window into the free blue sky. Being some eighteen feet from the ground, it had not been thought necessary to bar the casement beyond

possibility of their trying to escape. The feat would assuredly not so much as suggest itself. Nevertheless, the temptation crept into the soul of Ninon, and she quickly imparted it to Marsillac.

Looking down, they saw that soft green turf belted the base of the wall, and taking hurried counsel, they climbed to the window-sill, and at the risk of their necks, clutching by the carved stonework, and the stout old ivy trails with which it was mantled, they dropped to the ground, and then away they hied by the clipped yew alleys, mercilessly trampling the parterres—away till they found themselves in the forest. Free now as the sweet breeze playing in their hair, they ran on, pranking and shouting, now following the little beaten tracks, now bounding over the brushwood, heedless of the rents and scratches of the thorny tangles; until after some hours, Marsillac's pace began to drag, and very soon he said he was tired.

"That is no matter," said Ninon, "we will hire a carriage at the first place we come to"; but the name of that place was not even to be guessed at; inasmuch as they had not the least notion which way they had taken. The great thing was to arrive at last at Tours, where Ninon said they could at once enlist as soldiers. Marsillac was, however, tired—very tired; his legs ached, and he sat down for a little rest, observing rather crossly, in the cynical way which sometimes he had, that talking was all very well; but for one thing they were not big enough for soldiers, and for another, you could not have a carriage without paying for it.

"Of course not," acquiesced Ninon, proudly producing her double louis. "Can I not pay?" But the hours passed, the sun declined, and not so much as a solitary cottage had presented itself to their eyes, into which a shade of anxiety had crept; and ere long they began to feel certain they saw wolves and lions and bandits lurking in all directions behind the huge black forest tree-trunks, and young Monsieur de la Rochefoucauld had now grown so tired that, he wanted nothing so much as to go to bed. Even supper was a secondary consideration. Still, desperately hungry as they both were, liberty is such a glorious thing; and were they not free?—free as the air that was growing so chilly, and the pale moonlight rays as they broke through some darkening clouds, seemed to make it almost shuddery. These, however, suddenly crossed something white, and though terrifying for the moment, the second glance to which they schooled themselves brought reassurance. The white patch they saw was a bit of a cottage wall pierced by a little lattice, through which gleamed the yellow light of a tallow candle; for the two, creeping close to the panes, peeped in. But noiselessly as they strove to render their movements, the attention of a couple of big dogs of the *boule-dogue* breed was aroused, to the extent of one of them fastening upon Marsillac's *haut-de-chausses*, and he was only induced to forbear and drop off, under the knotty, chastising stick of a man, apparently the master of the house, who turned upon the trembling truants, and bade them clear off for the vagabonds they were. Their mud-stained and torn

apparel, rendered more dilapidated in Marsillac's case, by the dog's teeth, justified to a great extent the man's conclusions; but on their asseverating that they were not good-for-nothing at all; but two very well-born young gentlemen who had lost their way, and would be glad to pay generously for a supper, he called his wife, and committing them to her care, bade her entertain them with the best her larder afforded, and to put a bottle of good wine on the table. Then he went out, while an excellent little piece of a haunch of roe-deer—cooking apparently for the supper of the worthy couple themselves—which Dame Jacqueline set before the hungry wanderers, was heartily appreciated by both. Washed down by a glass or two of the fairly good wine, Marsillac grew hopelessly drowsy. Tired out, he wanted to go to bed. "And why not?" said the dame, not without a gleam of malice in her eyes, which had been keenly measuring the two—"but I have only one bed to offer you, our own, and you must make the best of it." She smiled on.

"Not I," said Ninon, rising from the settle like a giant refreshed—"I am going on to Tours. The moon is lovely. It will be delightful. How much to pay, dame? And a thousand thanks for your hospitality. Come, Marsillac," and Ninon strode to the door. But the glimpses of the pillows within the shadow of the alcove had been too much for Marsillac, and he had already divested himself of his *justaucorps*, and jumped into bed.

"And now, my young gentleman, what about

you?" inquired Jacqueline of the embarrassed Ninon, who seated herself disconsolately on a little three-legged stool. "Come, quick, to bed with you!"

"No!" said Ninon, "I prefer this stool."

"Oh, ta! ta! that will never do," said Jacqueline, who was beginning to heap up a broad old settle with a cushion or two, and some wraps. "Sooner than that, I would sit on that stool myself all night, and give you up my place here beside my—Ah! *à la bonne heure!* There he is," she cried, as the heavy footsteps of the master of the house, crunching up the garden path, amid the barking of the dogs, grew audible—"and, as I say, give you up my own place—"

"Ah, *mon Dieu!* no," distractedly cried Ninon, tearing off her cloak; and bounding into the alcove, to the side of the already fast asleep Marsillac, she dragged the coverings over her head.

"Well, good-night! Sweet repose, you charming little couple," laughed on Dame Jacqueline, as she drew the curtains to. "But I'd not go to sleep yet awhile, look you. Some friends of yours are coming here to see you. Ah yes, here they are! This way, ladies."

And the next moment, Madame de Montaigu and the Duchesse de la Rochefoucauld stood within the alcove, gazing down with glances beyond power of words to describe.

Dragged by the two ladies from their refuge, Marsillac was hustled into his garments, but Ninon was bidden to leave hers alone, and to don the petticoats and bodice which the baroness had

brought for the purpose. "No more masquerading, if you please," said her aunt, in tones terrible with indignation and severity, "while I have you under my charge. Now, quick, home with you!"

And home they were conducted, disconsolate, crestfallen, arriving there in an extraordinarily short space of time; for the château lay not half a league off, and the two runaways, who had imagined that the best part of Touraine had been covered by them that fine summer day, discovered that the mazes of the forest paths had merely led them round and about within hail of Loches, and Dame Jacqueline and her husband had at once recognised them. The man had then hastened immediately to the château, and informed the ladies, to their indescribable relief, about the two good-for-nothings; for the hue and cry after Mademoiselle Ninon and young Monsieur de la Rochefoucauld had grown to desperation as the sun westered lower and lower.

Ninon wept tears of chagrin and humiliation at the penalty she had to pay of being a girl again; but Marsillac's spirits revived with astonishing rapidity. He even seemed to be glad at the idea of his fellow-scapegrace being merely one of the weaker and gentler sex, and in her dejection he was for ever seeking to console her. "I love you ever so much better this way, dear one," he was constantly saying. "Ah, Ninon, you are beautiful as an angel!"

But alas! for the approach of Black Monday, and the holidays ended, Marsillac had to go back to school.

CHAPTER II

Troublesome Huguenots—Madame de L'Enclos—An Escapade, and Nurse Madeleine—Their Majesties—The Hôtel Bourgogne—The End of the Adventure—St Vincent de Paul and his Charities—Dying Paternal Counsel—Ninon's New Home—Duelling—Richelieu and the Times.

The attack upon La Rochelle, and the incessant Huguenot disturbances generally, detained Monsieur de L'Enclos almost entirely away from Ninon, who remained at Loches in the care of her aunt. From time to time he paid flying visits to Loches—one stay, however, lasting many months, enforced by a severe wound he had received. This period he spent in continuing the instruction of his daughter, on the plan originally mapped out, of fitting her to shine in society. The course included philosophy, languages, music, with his special objections to the matrimonial state—engendered, or at least aggravated by his own failure in the search after happiness along that path. Far better, undesirable as he held the alternative, to be wedded to cloistered seclusion than any man's bride; and well knowing Ninon's horror of a nun's life, he left her to argue out the rest for herself in her own logical fashion; and there is no doubt that the whole of her future was influenced by the views he then inculcated. A modest decorum and sobriety of bearing were indeed indispensable to good breeding; but *carpe diem* was the motto of Monsieur de

L'Enclos, as he desired it to be hers; and every pleasure afforded by this one life, certainly to be called ours, ought to be enjoyed while it lasted; and unswervingly, to the final page of her long record, Ninon carried out the comfortable doctrine.

At seventeen years of age, she was perfectly equipped. Beautiful and highly accomplished, amiable and winning, and though always well dressed, troubling vastly little over the petty fripperies and vanities ordinarily engrossing the female mind, she appears to have gained the commendation and affection of her aunt, who parted from her with great regret, when the failing health of Madame de L'Enclos necessitated Ninon's departure from Loches, to go to Paris, where the invalid was residing.

Monsieur de L'Enclos fetched Ninon himself from Loches, and in a day or two she was by her mother's couch. Madame de L'Enclos received her with affection, and affectionately Ninon tended her, going unmurmuringly through the old courses of religious reading and observance, even to renewing acquaintance with the gouty canon in Notre-Dame; but the invalid's chamber was *triste* and monotonous, and now and again Ninon effected a few hours' escape from it, ostensibly for the purpose of attending Mass or Benediction, or some service at one or other of the neighbouring churches. One of them, St Germain l'Auxerrois, was of special interest to Ninon, by reason of neighbouring the hotel of Madame de la Rochefoucauld; and she one day interrogated the guardian of the *porte cochère*, in

the hope of learning some news of Marsillac, whom Time's chances and changes had entirely removed from her ken; but whose memory endured in her heart; for she had been very sincerely attached to him. The Suisse informing her that he very rarely came to Paris, the philosophical mind of Ninon soon turned for consolation elsewhere. On this plea of devout attendance at church, Ninon was freely permitted leave of absence from the sick room, duennaed by her old nurse, Madeleine, who, however, frequently permitted herself to be dropped by the way, at a small house of public entertainment, above whose door ran the following invitation to step inside :—

> "If of dyspepsia you've a touch,
> Ache of tooth, or head, or such,
> There's nothing like a nip, you see,
> Of my delicious Eau de Vie."

On one of these occasions, her charge went off in the company of a fairly good-looking and agreeable young gentleman who addressed her, as she halted for an instant at the corner of the Pont Neuf, in terms of mingled respect and admiration. Under his escort, she gathered some conception of the manners and mode of existence in the gay city, and in the course of their first walk together, they ran against two of her cavalier's friends, who were to be associated intimately with her future—Gondi, the future Cardinal de Retz, and the young Abbé Scarron—Abbé by courtesy, since he never went beyond the introductory degree of an ecclesiastical career. In the company of these three merry

companions, she visited the Hôtel Bourgogne, a place which may be described as answering more to the music-halls, than to the theatres of the present time. Its frequenters could dine or sup at its tables, take a turn at *tarot* or thimblerig, and enjoy a variety entertainment carried out on lines mainly popular. It was a vast edifice, built in the Renaissance style, by Francis I., on the site of the gloomy, fortress-like mansion of Jean Sans Peur; and for a time it had been devoted to the representation of the Passion and Mystery plays, and the performances of the clerks of the Basoche, but grown decadent in these days of Louis XIII. Ninon obtained on her way a passing glimpse of His Majesty as he drove by, describing him "as a man of twenty-five; but looking much older, on account of his morose and taciturn expression, responding to the acclamations of the people only by a cold and ceremonious acknowledgment; while Anne of Austria, who followed in a coach preceded by other carriages, saluted the crowd with gracious smiles and wavings of her white hand."

Having partaken of a light collation at one of the tables, the party gave attention for a while to the actors on the stage, whose performances were coarse, and not much to Ninon's taste. Then Gondi and Scarron took leave of the two, and the sequel of the adventure proved a warning to young women endowed with any measure of self-respect, to refrain from making acquaintance with gallants in the street. Fortunately she escaped the too ardent attentions of the man, through the inter-

vention and protection of one of more delicacy and honour. Though this one was quickly equally enthralled, he went about his wooing of the beautiful girl in more circumspect fashion, a wooing nipped in the bud by his death from a wound received a short time later.

In the sombre calm of the invalid's room stands out the grand figure of St Vincent de Paul, bringing to her, as to all the afflicted and heavy-laden, the message of Divine love and pity, and impressing Ninon with a lasting memory of reverence for the serene, pure face and gentle utterances of a heart filled with devotion for the Master he served. Never weary in well-doing, seeming ever to see God, his life was one long self-sacrifice and work of charity. Moved to such compassion for the poor convict of the galleys, who wept for the thought of his wife and children, that the good priest took the fetters from the man's limbs, and bidding him go free and sin no more, wound them upon his own wrists: a heart so thrilled with love and sorrow for the lot of the miserable little forsaken children of the great city, that he did not rest till he had effected the reforms so sorely-needed for their protection.

Hitherto the small waifs and strays had been under the superintendence of the Archbishop of Paris. The charge of them was, however, delegated to venal nurses, who would frequently sell them for twenty sous each. On fête and red-letter days, it had for long been a custom to expose the little creatures on huge bedsteads chained to the pavement of Notre-Dame, in order to excite the pity

of the people, and draw money for their maintenance. St Vincent de Paul was stirred to the endeavour of putting a stop to these scandals; and instituted a hospital for the foundlings. It was situated by the Gate of St Victor, and the work of it was carried on by charitable ladies. The Hospital of Jesus, for eighty poor old men, was another of his good works; while he ministered to the lunatics of the Salpétrière, and to the lepers of St Lazare, within whose church walls he was laid to rest when at last he rendered up his life to the Master he had served; until the all-destroying Terror disturbed his remains: but "his works do follow him." His compassion alone for the little ones will keep his memory green for all time.

Kneeling at his feet, at her mother's bidding, the good priest bade Ninon rise, saying that to God alone the knee should be bent. Then he laid his hand on her head, calling down a benediction on her, and praying that she should be protected from the temptations of a sinful world. His words thrilled her powerfully for the time being. She felt moved to pour out all her heart to him, but "Satan," she says, "held me fast, and would not let me approach God," and the spell of the saintly man's influence passed with his presence.

A few days later, Madame de L'Enclos died, calmly, and tended by her husband and her child, leaving at least affectionate respect for her memory. A year later, Monsieur de L'Enclos died. True to the last to his rule of life, the dying words he addressed to his daughter were these—

"My child, you see that all that remains to me in these last moments, is but the sad memory of pleasures that are past; I have possessed them but for a little while, and that is the one complaint I have to make of Nature. But alas! how useless are my regrets! You, my daughter, who will doubtless survive me for so many years, profit as quickly as you may of the precious time, and be ever less scrupulous in the number of your pleasures, than in your choice of them."

The fortune of Mademoiselle de L'Enclos had been greatly diminished by the reckless extravagances of her father; and conscious, probably, of this error in himself, he was careful to protect her best interests, by purchasing for her an annuity which brought her 8,000 livres annual income. His prodigality was, however, one of the few of his characteristics she did not inherit. On the contrary, she displayed through life a conspicuous power of regulating the business sides of it with a prudence which enabled her to be generous to her friends in need, while not stinting herself, or the ordering of her households, and the entertainment of the company she delighted in; for the *réunions* and evenings of Mademoiselle de L'Enclos were a proverb for all that was at once charming and intellectual; varied as they were with sweet music, to which her own singing contributed—more notably still, by her performances on the lute, which were so skilful; though by these hangs the complaint that she ordinarily needed a great deal of pressing before she would indulge the company—a curious exception to

the ruling of the ways of Ninon, ordinarily so entirely innocent of affectation.

At this time her beauty and accomplishments, united with her fortune, drew many suitors for her hand, and of these there would probably have been many more, but for the certainty she made no secret of, that marriage was not in the picture of the life she had sketched out for herself. Her passion for liberty of thought and action in every aspect, fostered ever by her father, was dominant in her, and not to be sacrificed for the most brilliant matrimonial yoke.

One of her first proceedings was the establishment of a home for herself. It consisted of a handsome suite of rooms in the rue des Tournelles, in the quarter of the Marais, then one of the most fashionable in Paris, and distinguished for the many intellectual and gifted men and women congregating in the stately, red-bricked, lofty-roofed houses surrounding the planted space in whose centre, a little later, was to stand the equestrian statue of Louis XIII. The square had been planned by Mansard, and Ninon's home—Number 23—had been occupied by the famous architect himself.

A few doors off was the residence of Cardinal Richelieu, and within the convenient distance of a few houses—Number 6—lived Marion Delorme. For years this Place Royale, as it is now called—at one time Place des Vosges—had been, until Mansard transformed it, held an accursed spot, and let go to ruin; for here it was stood the palace of the Tournelles, a favourite residence of Henri II., and in its courtyard took place the fatal encounter

between him and the Englishman Montgomery, whose lance pierced through the king's eye, to his brain, and caused his death. Catherine de Médicis, in her grief and indignation at the tragic ending of that day's tilt, caused the palace to be razed to the ground; but the old associations clung to the place, for it became the favourite spot for the countless duels which the young bloods and others were constantly engaging in; until Richelieu put an almost entire stop to them by his revival of the summary law against the practice, whose penalty was death by decapitation. The great cardinal's ruling was not to be evaded, and several men of rank suffered death upon the scaffold for disobeying it.

Away beyond the St Antoine Gate at Picpus, Ninon established another dwelling for herself, in which it was her custom to rusticate during the autumn.

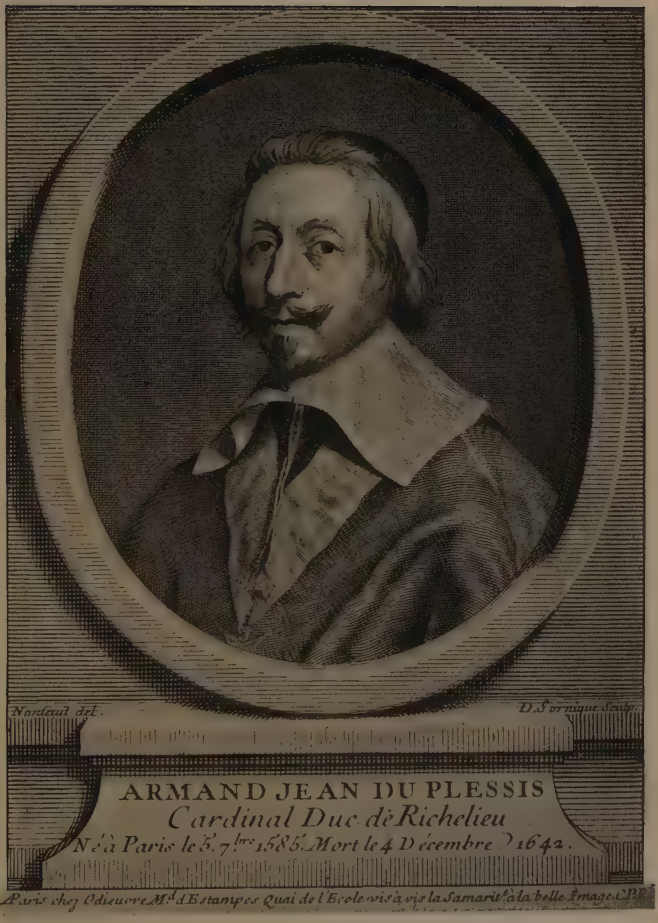
Beautiful—though in features not faultlessly so—she bore some resemblance to Anne of Austria, the adored of Buckingham, a likeness close enough to admit of the success of a freak played years later, when she contrived to deceive Louis the Great into the notion that the shade of his mother appeared to him, to chide him for certain evil ways. Her nose, like the queen's, was large, and her beautiful teeth gleamed through lips somewhat full in their curves; her hair was dark and luxuriant, while her intelligent and sympathetic eyes expressed an indescribable mingling of reserve and voluptuous languor, magnetising all, coupled as it was with the charm of her gentle, courteous manner and conversation that sparkled with the wit and

sentiment of a mind enriched by careful training and study of the literature of her own time, and of the past. It was her crowning grace that she made no display of these really sterling acquirements, and entertained a wholesome detestation of the pedantry and *précieuse* taint of the learned ladies mocked at so mercilessly by that dear friend of hers, Molière. Few could boast a complexion so delicately fresh as hers. She stands sponsor to this day to toilette powders and cosmetics. Bloom and *poudre de Ninon* boxes find place on countless women's dressing-tables to this hour; but in her own case art rendered little assistance, possibly none at all; except for one recipe she employed daily through her life. The secret of it, sufficiently transparent, was equally in the possession of the beautiful Diana of Poitiers, who also retained her beauty for such a length of years.

For all who list to read, her letter-writing powers stand perpetuated in her published correspondence, and while the theme is almost unvarying—the philosophy of love and friendship—her wit and fancy treat it in a thousand graceful ways. Fickle as she was in love, she was constant in friendship, and the heat of the first, often so startlingly transient, frequently settled down into life-long *camaraderie* rarely destroyed. While not ungenerous to her rivals in the tender passion, she could be dangerously jealous; but gifted with the saving grace of humour, of which women are said to be destitute, the anger and malice were oftentimes allowed to die down into forgiveness, and perhaps also, forget-

fulness. Rearing and temperament set Ninon de L'Enclos apart; even among those many notable women whose intimate she was. Essentially a product of her century, she lived her own life in its fulness. Following ever her father's counsel, she was at once as boundlessly unrestricted in her observance of that perfect law of liberty to which she yielded obedience, as she was scrupulous in selection. Says Monsieur de St Evrémond of her—"Kindly and indulgent Nature has moulded the soul of Ninon from the voluptuousness of Epicurus and the virtue of Cato."

And at last, after an interval of six years, Ninon and Marsillac met again. It was in the salon of the Hôtel de Rambouillet. Mademoiselle de L'Enclos, beautiful, sought after, already the centre of an admiring circle, the talk of Paris, and Monsieur le Capitaine de la Rochefoucauld, already for two or three years a gallant soldier, chivalrous, romantic, handsome with the beauty of intellect, interesting from his air of gentle, cynical pensiveness, ardent in the cause of the queen so mercilessly persecuted by Richelieu, and therefore lacking the advancement his qualities merited, still, however, finding opportunity to indulge in the gallantries of the society he so adorned. Some one has said that few ever less practically recognised the doctrines of Monsieur de la Rochefoucauld's maxims, than did Monsieur de la Rochefoucauld himself, and the aphorisms have been criticised, and exception has again and again been taken to them, not perhaps altogether unreasonably; but in any case he justified himself of his dictum that "love


Nanteuil del.
D. Sornique Sculp.
ARMAND JEAN DU PLESSIS
Cardinal Duc de Richelieu
Né à Paris le 5.e 7.bre 1585. Mort le 4 Décembre 1642.
A Paris chez Odieuvre Md d'Estampes Quai de l'Ecole vis à vis la Samaritaine à la belle Image.

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is the smallest part of gallantry" ; for when at last—and it took some time—Marsillac recognised his old scapegrace chum of the Loches château, homage and admiration he yielded her indeed ; but it was far from undivided, and shared in conspicuously by her rival, Marion Delorme, a woman of very different mould from Ninon. Like her, beautiful exceedingly, but more impulsive, softer-natured, more easily apt to give herself away and to regret later on. Intellectually greatly Ninon's inferior, she was yet often a thorn in the side of the jealous Mademoiselle de L'Enclos.

The times, as a great commentator has defined them, were indeed peculiar. The air, full of intrigue, was maintained by Richelieu at fever-heat, and wheel worked fast and furiously within wheel. There was the king's party, though the king was little of it, or in it. The iron hand of the Cardinal Prime-Minister was upon the helm. Richelieu, who never stayed in resistance to the encroaching efforts of Spain—in his policy of crushing the feudal strength of the nobility of the provinces—or in annihilating Huguenot power as a political element in the State—saw in every man and woman not his violent partisan, an enemy to France and to the Crown. How far he was justified, how far he could have demanded "Is there not a cause?" stands an open question ; but the effect was terrible. The relentless hounding down of the suspected, forms a page of history stained with the blood of noble and gallant men. Richelieu's crafty playing with his marked victims, chills the soul. They were as ninepins in his hands, lured to

their destruction, sprung upon, crushed often when most they believed themselves secure.

Sending de Thou to the scaffold for his supposed complicity in the crime Richelieu fixed on Cinq-Mars, the handsome, insouciant, brilliant young fellow he had himself provided for the king's amusement, and when the time was ripe, having done him to death by the Lyons headsman upon a superficially-based accusation. Richelieu was dying then. The consciousness of Death's hand upon his harassed, worn-out frame was fully with him; but no pity was in his heart for Cinq-Mars. It might have been the old rankling jealousy that urged him on, for the stern, inflexible Armand de Richelieu was a poor, weak tool of a creature where women were concerned. "There is no such word as fail," he was wont to say; yet in his relations with women, and in his gallantries he failed egregiously. No fear of him held back Marion Delorme from the arms of Cinq-Mars, when she yielded to his persuasions to fly with him; and self-love must have been bitterly wounded, when Anne of Austria laughed his advances to scorn. Richelieu was not a lady's man. Nature had given him a brain rarely equalled, a stupendous capacity and penetration, but she had neglected him personally — meagre, sharp-featured, cadaverous, scantily furnished as to beard and moustache, and lean as to those red-stockinged legs. True, or the mere fruit of cruel scandal, that saraband *pas seul* he was said to have been duped into performing for the delectation of the queen, will hang ever by the memory of the great Lord Cardinal.

CHAPTER III

A Life-long Friend—St Evrémond's Courtly *Mot*—Rabelais *v.* Petronius—Society and the Salons—The Golden Days—The Man in Black.

SCARCELY was acquaintance renewed with her still quite youthful old friend, Monsieur de la Rochefoucauld, than Ninon met for the first time St Evrémond—Charles de St Denys, born 1613, at St Denys le Guast near Coutances in Normandy—the man with whom her name is so indissolubly connected, traversing nearly all the decades of the seventeenth century into the early years of the eighteenth, his span of life about equalling her own, and though for half of it absent from her and from his country, maintaining the links of their intimacy in their world-famed correspondence.

Like Ninon's, his individuality was exceptional. A born wit, for even in his childhood, the soubriquet of "*Esprit*" was bestowed upon him, his three brothers being severally styled—"The Honest Man," "The Soldier," and "The Abbé." Charles de St Evrémond was distinguished by a brilliant and singularly amiable intelligence. As a man of letters he was rarely gifted; though he evaded, more than sought, the celebrity attaching to the profession of literature, writing only, it may be truly said of him—

"... in numbers
For the numbers came."

he never put forward his own works for publication, and it was only towards the close of his life that his consent was obtained for such publication. During his lifetime, many of his pieces in prose and in verse were printed and circulated in Paris and in London, where, at the Courts of Charles II. and of William III., forty years of his life were spent; but these were pirated productions, surreptitiously issued by his "friends," to whom he occasionally confided his compositions, and they, for their own gain, sold them to the booksellers, who eagerly sought them. These pieces were altogether unfaithful to their originals, being altered to suit the particular sentiments of readers, and added to, in order to increase the bulk of the volumes. The style of St Evrémond's writings has been the subject of encomium and warm appreciation from numerous learned critics and litterateurs, notably St Beuve and Dryden.

One contemporary editor, withholding his name, content with styling himself merely "A Person of Honour," has, at all events, yielded due homage to St Evrémond's character and genius. Commenting on the essays which have come within his ken, he writes—

"Their fineness of expression, delicacy of thought are united with the ease of a gentleman, the exactness of a scholar, and the good sense of a man of business. It is certain," he adds, "that the author is thoroughly acquainted with the world, and has conversed with the best sort of men to be found in it."

To this may be added the praise of Dryden—

"There is not only a justness in his conceptions, which

is the foundation of good writing, but also a purity of language, and a beautiful turn of words, so little understood by modern writers."

Agreeable, witty, an excellent conversationalist, and of real amiability of character and disposition, St Evrémond's aim in life was to enjoy it. Indolently inclined, he accepted the ills and contrarieties of existence, finding even in them some soul of good. Always fond of animals, he surrounded himself in later years with cats and dogs, holding them eminently sympathetic and amusing; and he was wont to say that in order to divert the uneasinesses of old age, it was desirable to have before one's eyes something alive and animated.

He possessed enough money for comfortable maintenance from several sources. Both Charles II. and William III. settled "gratifications" on him. His creed was a formless one, but he was no atheist, for all the charge of it laid to him. He was, on the contrary, quick to rebuke the profanity and laxity of mockers. He himself sums up his religion in these lines—

"Justice and Charity supply the place
Of rigid penance and a formal face.
His piety without inflicted pains
Flows easy, and austerity disdains.
God only is the object of his care,
Whose goodness leaves no room for black despair.
Within the bosom of His providence
He places his repose, his bliss and sure defence."

His writings were voluminous, flowing from his pen as a labour he delighted in. Their themes

were varied, brought from the rich stores of his mind, his most enduring and favourite subjects being classical Latin lore, and the drama of his own day, lustrous with great names in France, as in the country of his adoption.

Such, and much more, was St Evrémond the man of letters, and besides, he was a skilful and gallant soldier, distinguished for his brilliant sword-play, when he entered upon the exercises preparatory for his military career. In that capacity he won the approval and friendship of the Duke d'Enghien, fighting by the prince's side at Rocroi and Nordlingen; though later a breach occurred in their relations, when St Evrémond indulged in some raillery at his expense. The great man vastly enjoyed persiflage of the sort where the shafts were levelled at others; but he brooked none of them aimed at himself, and St Evrémond was deprived of his lieutenancy.

Sometimes the wit carried a more flattering note, and once when disgrace shadowed him at Court for having appeared in the Sun-King's presence in a *pourpoint* of a fashion not quite up to latest date, he said to His Majesty—"Sire, away from you, one is not merely unhappy: one also becomes ridiculous." The conceit wiped away St Evrémond's disfavour. He was a friend of several of the other renowned soldiers of his time, Turenne among them. It was one of Condé's great delights to be read to by St Evrémond. The duke took pleasure in the lighter classics. Petronius had its attractions for him, as it had for

the society generally of the time; but he would have none of Rabelais, finding the grossness of the Curé of Meudon intensely distasteful, and refusing to listen to the adventures of Gargantua and Pantagruel and Grandgousier, and all their tribe, he insisted on the book being thrown aside. The merry romances of Petronius, or, at least, attributed to that "*Elegantiæ Arbiter*" of a pagan court, while ill adapted as milk for babes, as perhaps even for the more advanced in years, were not soiled with the lowermost grossness of the Christian man's pen, and they were not without appeal to the students of the classic literature opened up by the Renaissance, even as the milder licence of Boccaccio charmed.

Truly, if the times were peculiar, it cannot be said of them that they were stagnant; and in movement and activity, the present century bears them some sort of comparison; though beyond this the parallel fails, to the winning of the days of Ninon. *Autres temps, autres mœurs*, and while there may be more veneer of morality in these present years of grace than then, the question remains whether the sense of it is deeper and more widely observed. It is one, however, outside the limits of these pages. Only that the aroma and delicacy of educated social intercourse do not permeate society as in that time is undoubted. Of course the impression existing in some minds of the widespread canker of profligacy and licentiousness then openly prevailing, is perverting of facts, since punctilio and the Court etiquette of the most punctilious of monarchs would not, and could not, have countenanced it.

Such licence was indulged in by, and confined, as it is now, to a certain section of the "smart" community, and this possibly no such narrow one; but at least it was veiled then by certain elements of good taste, and some womanly graces now far to seek. Not then, as now, the motor craze made existence uglier; then as not now, the bold, inane stares and painted faces of many of the gentler sex frequenting the highways and byways, were mostly screened by masks, and an awkward gait was mantled. Some cultivation of expression, and a little more sense, if not wit, graced the tongues now devoted to slang and the misuse of words which hang about the higher education; while the clamour of ill-advised women without doors was unknown. The comments of a recent French writer on the charm of life in those past days, are too valuable to be laid aside unrecorded. "The keen intellects of the time," he writes, "caught a glimpse of everything, desired everything, and grasped eagerly at every new idea. Only those," he goes on to say, quoting Talleyrand, "could realise the joy of being alive. The childish present-day philosophy of optimism and effort fails to lend life a charm it never knew before. The most insignificant gallant of the Court of Louis experienced more varied sensations than any rough-rider or industrial king has ever been able to procure for himself." Admittedly, the evils of the time cried aloud for redress of wrongs which were all to be washed away later by the river of blood; but these had been more ameliorated than aggravated by the scholarship of thoughtful writers. Wit,

and the sense of beauty and delicacy of expression, carried, not unfrequently it is true, to affectations and absurdity, was the order of the day, binding men and women in links of an intellectual sympathy, whose pure gold was unalloyed by baser metal. Those *réunions* in the salons of the great ladies, must have been delightful, thronged as they were with distinguished men, and with women, many of them beautiful, *spirituelle*, or both. But for the sparkle of true wit, the music of sweet voices, the ripple of verse and epigram, the popularity of those gatherings would not have been so long maintained. The atmosphere of them was sweet with the lighter learning of old Rome and Greece, and the gaiety of graceful modern rhymes, or the sentiment of the latest sonnet. The passing of centuries had now left far behind the barbaric clash of warfare, and widened the old limitations of mediævalism and Scholasticism. From the hour the cruel knife of Ravaillac stilled the noble heart of the great Henri, the times had ripened to the harvest of a literature resplendent with promise of illustrious names.

Ever zealous for the glory of France, Richelieu founded the Académie Française; and later the college of the Sorbonne, where now he lies magnificently entombed, was rebuilt by him, and devoted to its old purpose of a centre of learning; and as of old, and as ever, men thronged from near and from afar to Paris for the study of art and learning, and to pay such homage to the modern Muses and enjoy their smiles, as good fortune might allow.

Amid such environment it was, that Ninon embarked upon the stream of the life she had elected to follow, hoping to pass, as indeed she did, through the years serenely and in fair content. If now and again some minor questions of spirit troubled her—conscience it could scarcely be called, since by the lights she had chosen to guide her, conscience could hardly be reproachful—it was but passingly. Yet the tale goes of the visits of a Man in Black, a most mysterious personage, who at his first interview, when she was about eighteen years old, brought her a phial containing a rose-coloured liquid, of which a little, a mere drop, went a very long way. It was the recipe for prolonged youthfulness, and certainly must have been very efficacious. It was, he said, to be mixed with a great deal of pure water, quite as much as a good-sized bath would contain—and a bath of pure water is, of course, in itself a very healthful sort of thing. Many a year went by before the Man in Black—or one so like him as to be his very double—came again, and Ninon was prone to shrink at the remembrance of him. When he did come, it was to inform her that some years of this life still lay before her; and then for the third time that Man in Black presented himself, and— But the cry is a far one to seventy years hence, and during that time, as far as Ninon was concerned, he remained in his own place, wherever that might be; and if, after all, he had been but a dream, in any case the shadow of his sable garb does not appear to have been very constantly cast upon the mirror of her exist-

ence. That was bright with love and friendship, the love and friendship of both sexes, and truly if in love she was frankly fickle *à merveille*, in friendship she was constant and unchanging. Ever following the dying parental counsel, she was fastidious in the choice of the aspirants to her favours. In her relations with women and men alike, honest and honourable and full of a kindly charm which made her exceptionally *bonne camarade*. It was small wonder that the salon of Mademoiselle Ninon de L'Enclos was a centre of foregathering greatly sought after.

CHAPTER IV

A "Delicious Person"—Voiture's Jealousy—A Tardy Recognition—Coward Conscience—A Protestant Pope—The Hôtel de Rambouillet—St Evrémond—The Duel—Nurse Madeleine—Cloistral Seclusion and Jacques Callot—"Merry Companions Every One"—and One in Particular.

Six years had passed since as girl and boy Ninon and Marsillac had parted at Loches. At sixteen years old he had entered the army, and was now Monsieur le Capitaine de la Rochefoucauld, returned to Paris invalided by a serious wound received in the Valtellina warfare. Handsome, with somewhat pensive, intellectual features, chivalrous and amiable, he was "a very parfite gentle knight," devoted to the service of the queen, which sorely interfered with his military promotion: devotion to Anne of Austria was ever to meet the hatred of the cardinal, and to live therefore in peril of life.

The daring young hoyden of Loches was now a graceful, greatly admired woman of the world, welcomed and courted in the ranks of the society to which her birth entitled her.

It was quite possible that the change in her appearance was sufficiently great to warrant de la Rochefoucauld's failure to recognise her in the salon of Madame de Rambouillet when he passed her, seated beside her chaperon, the Duchesse de la Ferté—not, however, without marking her beauty; and he inquired of the man with whom he was walk-

ing who the "delicious person" was. The gentleman did not know. It was the first time, he believed, that the lady had been seen in the brilliant company. The impressionable young prince lost little time in securing himself an introduction, further economising it by expressing his sentiments of admiration so ardently, that they touched on a passionate and tender declaration. Ninon accepted this with the equanimity distinguishing her; she was already accustomed to a pronounced homage very thinly veiled. It was to her as the sunshine is to the birds of the air, almost indispensable; but she found the avowals of his sentiments slightly disturbing in the reflection that Marsillac had altogether forgotten his Ninon. That, in fact, he had done long since. The fidelity of de la Rochefoucauld in those days, was scarcely to be reckoned on even by hours. Already he was in the toils of Ninon's beautiful rival, Marion Delorme, a woman Ninon herself describes as "adorably lovely." Beauty apart, the very antithesis of Mademoiselle de L'Enclos, weaker of will, more pliably moulded, warm-hearted, impulsive, romantically natured, apt to be drawn into scrapes and mistakes which Ninon was astute enough rarely to encounter. The two women lived within a stone's throw of each other, and it needed hardly the gossip of the place for Ninon to observe that Marsillac was but one more of the vast company of arch-deceivers. It was Voiture, the poet and renowned reformer of the French tongue, who hinted the fact to Ninon with, no doubt, all his wonted grace of expression,

further inspired by jealousy of the handsome young captain, that at the very moment he was speaking, de la Rochefoucauld was spending the afternoon in Marion's company, *en tête-à-tête.*

Thereupon, linking her arm in Voiture's, Ninon begged him to conduct her to Number 6, rue des Tournelles. The poet, vastly enjoying the excitement his words had evoked, readily complied, and arrived at Marion's apartments where the Capitaine de la Rochefoucauld was duly discovered. Then broke the storm, ending in Marsillac's amazement when Ninon demanded how it was that he had not discovered in her his old friend Ninon de L'Enclos. Then, in the joy and delight of recognition, Marsillac, forgetting the very presence of her rival, sprang to her side, and offering her his arm, sallied forth back to Ninon's abode, spending the rest of the day in recalling old times at Loches, and in transports of happiness. Only late into the night, long after Marsillac had left her presence and she was lost in dreamful sleep, it brought the faces of her mother and of St Vincent de Paul vividly before her, gazing with sad reproachful eyes; and with her facile pen she recorded the memory of that day, fraught with its conflict of spirit and desire.

"O sweet emotions of love! blessed fusion of souls! ineffable joys that descend upon us from Heaven! Why is it that you are united to the troubles of the senses, and that at the bottom of the cup of such delight remorse is found?"

Whether through the silence of the small hours any echoes touched her vivid imagination of the

Man in Black's mocking laughter, no record tells; but in any case, with the fading of the visions, the disturbing reflections were quickly lost in the joy of Marsillac's society, as also in that of St Evrémond—the very soul of gaiety and wit and every delightful characteristic.

> "How happy could I be with either,
> Were t'other dear charmer away,"

says Captain MacHeath, and there were days together that Marsillac did absent himself. The grand passion of his life was not with either of the two women, or with any of the fair dames then immediately around. They were merely the toys of his gallant and amiable nature, and at that time he was deeply absorbed in the duties of his profession, and his ardent devotion to the queen's cause. It was, indeed, one most difficult and dangerous, ever facing, as it did, the opposition of Richelieu, who saw in every friend and partisan of Anne of Austria Spanish aggression and a foe to France.

Some cause there surely was. Political and religious strife raged fast and hotly. From the outset—that is, at least, as far back as the time when the Calvinists banded together to resist the Catholics—it was not a question alone of reform or of change in religious conviction. It could not have remained at that: the whole framework of government would have been shaken to its foundation had the Reformed party ultimately triumphed; but the passing of a century had wrought startling changes.

There were many of the Catholic nobility whose policy was as much to side with the Huguenot party, as it had been the wisdom of the Protestant Henri IV. to adopt the Catholic creed. Richelieu, in conquering Rochelle, showed the vanquished Huguenots so much leniency, that public clamour nicknamed him "the Cardinal of Rochelle," and "the Protestant Pope," and he laughed, and said that there was more such scandal ahead; since he intended to achieve a marriage between the king's sister, Henrietta Maria, and the non-Roman Catholic king, Charles I. of England.

To hedge his country from the encroachment of Spain was the lifelong aim and endeavour of Richelieu, and he was ruthless in the means. The eastern and northern frontiers of France were constantly menaced and invaded by Austria and Spain and their allies, and to and fro to Paris came the great captains and soldiers engaged in the constant warfare against the enemy—men of long lineage, brave, skilful in arms, dauntless in action, and certainly no laggards in love when opportunity afforded; and they returned loaded with honour, covered with glory, and often seriously wounded, to be welcomed and made much of in the salons of noble and titled women, like the Duchesse de Rambouillet, and other *réunions* scarcely less celebrated and brilliant, where the fine art of wit, and the *culte* of poetry and belles lettres, mingled with a vast amount of love-making, and at least as much exquisite imitation of it, were assiduously conducted. It was the hall-mark of good society, a virtue

indispensable, and to be assumed if it did not really exist, and too greatly valued for other virtues to be set great store by. So that the line of demarcation between women of unimpeachable repute, and those following a wider primrose path grew to be so very thinly defined as sometimes to be invisible and disregarded. Notably in the refined and elegant salon of Ninon de L'Enclos were to be counted many ladies of distinction and modes of life untouched by the faintest breath of scandal, who loved her and sought her friendship, as there were men who were quite content to worship from afar, and to hold themselves her friends pure and simple to life's end.

Who of her admirers was the first winner of the smiles of a more tender intimacy, is not more than surmise, remaining recorded only in invisible ink in a *lettre de cachet* whose seal is intact. If the friend of her early girlhood at Loches is indicated, it may be intentionally misleading. Count Coligny was an acquaintance at whose coming Ninon's bright eyes acquired yet greater lustre, and de la Rouchefoucauld's reappearance had not yet taken place—"*ce cher Marsillac*," whose devotion, even while it lasted, was tinctured with divided homage, and was to dissolve altogether, in the way of love sentiments, in the sunshine of his deep undying attachment to Madame de Longueville. There was, however, no rupture in this connection; the burden of the old song was simply reversed, and if first Marsillac came for love, it was in friendship that he and Ninon parted, giving

place to the adoration of St Evrémond—bonds which were never broken, and whose warm sentiments the waters of the English Channel, flowing between for forty years, could not efface. The effect might have been even the contrary one, and absence made the heart grow fonder, though the temperaments of Ninon and of St Evrémond were undoubtedly generously free of any petty malignance and small jealousies.

Monsieur de L'Enclos had survived his wife only by one year. He died of a wound received in an encounter arising from a private quarrel. Had he recovered, it would probably have been to lose his head by the axe, paying the penalty of the law for some years past rigorously enforced against duelling. The scene of such encounter being most frequently the open space of the Place Royale, the locality of the cardinal's own house—as it was of Ninon and of Marion Delorme—so that his stern eyes were constantly reminded of the murderous conflicts. The law, having been enacted by Henri IV., had fallen into abeyance, until the specially sanguinary duel between the Comte de Bussy and the Comte de Bouteville, in 1622, when de Bouteville mortally wounded de Bussy, and Richelieu inflicted the penalty of decapitation on de Bouteville and on Rosmadec his second, as he did on others who disobeyed; so that the evil was scotched almost to stamping out. It was in this fashion that Richelieu made his power felt among the nobility and wealthier classes, and let it be understood that the law was the law for all.

Almost immediately following on the death of Monsieur de L'Enclos, came that of Ninon's old nurse, Madeleine—whose kind soul and devoted attachment were in no wise ill-affected by the small nips of *eau de vie* she inclined to—and just about the same time died Madame de Montaigu, her aunt at Loches; and thus within six months she had lost the few of her nearest and dearest from childhood, and she felt so saddened and desolate and heart-broken, that she formed the resolution of giving up the world and being a nun after all—yearning for the consolation which religion promises of reunion, and a fulness of sympathy not to be found in ordinary and everyday environments. Scarcely as yet with her foot on womanhood's bank of the river of life, the warm kindly nature of Ninon was chilled and dulled by sorrow and regret; and one evening, at the Hôtel de Rambouillet, in her ardent desire to find some peace and rest of spirit, she entered into conversation with the Père d'Orléans, a renowned Jesuit, on the subject of religious belief—but his best eloquence failed in convincing her of its efficacy.

The right of private judgment, ever one of her strongest characteristics, asserted itself, and she declared herself unconvinced. "Then, mademoiselle," said the ecclesiastic, "until you find conviction, offer Heaven your incredulity."

But while words failed, her heart still impelled her to the idea of the cloistered life, and she went to seek it in Lorraine, at a convent of Recollettes sisters near Nancy. There were many houses of

this Order in the duchy. The one sought entrance to by Ninon, was under the patronage of St Francis, and she was received with effusion by the Reverend Mother, a charming lady, herself still youthful. She had not, however, been there many days, relegated to a small cell, whose diminutive casement looked upon some immediately-facing houses, before she became impressed with the idea that, great as the desire might be to snatch in her a brand from the consuming of the wicked world, it was greater still for the little fortune she was known to possess; and with the passing of time, the gentle assuager of more poignant grief, she was beginning to feel less attracted towards the conventual mode of existence, and to wonder whether she really had the vocation for it. Meantime, the old spirit of adventure was strongly stirring her to defer the recital of a formidable list of *Aves* and penitential psalms, in favour of watching a window facing her loophole of a lattice, through which she could see a man busily engaged with burin and etching implements. While this in itself was not uninteresting, the interest was increased tenfold, when she contrived to discover that he was the already famous Jacques Callot, the engraver; and very little time was lost before the two had established means of communication by the aid of a long pole, to which they tied their manuscript interchange of messages and ideas—which culminated in Ninon's descent by a ladder of ropes from the lattice, and flight from the convent.

More sober chronicles relate of Jacques Callot,

that through all the curious vicissitudes and adventures of his earlier life, he remained blameless and of uncorrupted morality. It appears certain that his real inclination was ever for such paths, and the romantic love-affair which ended in his union with the woman he adored, was calculated to keep him in them; in which case the attributed version of his *liaison* with Ninon must be accepted with something over and above its grain of salt, and allowed to lie by. That he was a fearless, high-minded man, as well as a great artist, stands by his honoured name in a golden record; for when the imbroglio occurred between Louis XIII. and the Duke of Lorraine—in which, under the all-conquering cardinal prime-minister, France was the victor—Callot was commanded to commemorate the siege with his pencil—he refused. Callot was a Lorrainer, and the duke was his patron and liege-lord, and Callot refused to turn traitor, and prostitute his gift by recording the defeat of the duke, preferring to run the very close chance of death for high treason sooner than comply. If, as it is asserted, Ninon obtained for him the pardon of Richelieu, by virtue of some former favour or service she had done the cardinal, leaving him as yet in her debt for it, all was well that so well ended; and it adds one more to the list of Ninon's generous acts, never neglected where she had the power to perform them for those she loved.

Whether it is an undoubted fact that the fascination of Ninon—so absolutely all-potent as she herself claims for it—did tempt Callot temporarily

even from his allegiance to the love of the woman he won under such romantic circumstances, it is certain that she mercifully decided to leave him in tranquillity with his wife in Lorraine, returning to Paris in company with a little contingent of her old friends and admirers who had been engaged in fighting for their king along the north-eastern borderlands. Paris was so rich in convents, that the question irresistibly suggests itself why she should have travelled that hundred or so of miles to Nancy to take the veil. Possibly, knowing that Coligny, Scarron, Gondi, de la Rochefoucauld, St Evrémond, and other *bons camarades* were all in that direction, she was prompted to go thither to take final farewells of them before she stepped over the threshold masculine foot must not desecrate; but in this instance it was the propositions of man that triumphed in the face of every spiritual consideration, and all idea of the contemplative life was flung to the four winds in the delight of the old companionships and renewal of the *joie de vivre*. The reunion was celebrated in an impromptu feast, of reason and recherché dishes, and flow of sparkling wine, and unrestrained merriment and sallies of wit; for where Scarron and St Evrémond and de la Rochefoucauld were, wit could but abound. Next day they all started for Paris, transported thither by matchlessly swift-footed post-horses, Ninon choosing for her travelling companion *en tête-à-tête*, Coligny; and when the two arrived at rue des Tournelles, they did not part company; but arranged to retire to the *rus in urbe*

of her Picpus dwelling, away by Charenton, where they established *ménage* in the small but beautiful old house, once the dwelling of Henri Quatre and the fair Gabrielle, with one maid-servant, and one man servitor Ninon called Perrote, who had been the faithful valet of Monsieur de L'Enclos. Here the two passed an idyllic life, where more material enjoyments were diversified by intellectual conversation, sometimes profane, but more often taking a turn so far sacred, as to include the points of doctrine upon which Catholic and Protestant differed. Coligny, as a descendant of the great murdered Huguenot leader, was a Protestant; and while Richelieu treated the Huguenots socially with indulgence, he would not tolerate them as a political party, and to be of the Reformed, was utterly to lose chance of advancement—and Ninon was ambitious for her lover, and hence the religious discussions and her endeavours to inoculate him with clear conceptions of Catholic teaching. Coligny, however, was apt to show signs of boredom on these occasions, and to yawn so portentously, that she had to desist, leaving him heretical still, when one morning the Picpus *maisonette* was invaded by messengers from Richelieu, accompanied by halberdiers from the Bastille, who demanded the delivering up of the young man's sword, and bore him off a prisoner to the horrible old prison, on the charge of neglect of military duty. Once again Ninon's intercessions with Richelieu procured release and restoration; but Coligny was ungrateful and jealous of the red-robed priest, and would-be

galant homme, and passing away from Ninon's presence, he never entered it again, and in a very few weeks was married to the sister of the Duc de Luxembourg, an alliance possibly already entered upon at an earlier date, and the real ground of his rupture with Ninon.

She soon found balm for the inflicted wounds of Coligny's ingratitude, in the ardent admiration of the son of the Marquise de Rambouillet, seeing in him only the one absurd defect of desiring unchanging constancy, and on this point he was so tiresome that she was driven to promise fidelity for three months—"An eternity," said Ninon, ever mocking at love, which she ranked far below friendship.

The greatest apologist of the society of the seventeenth century could hardly describe it as strait-laced; except by comparison with the first half of the one succeeding; and if some of the *grandes dames* of the circle in which she moved held aloof and deprecated the unconventionalities of Mademoiselle de L'Enclos, for the most part they accepted them, more or less silently, and treated her with cordiality, delighting in her friendship, and fascinated by the elegance and dignity with which she conducted the hospitalities of her crowded salons. The prevailing charm of one graced with the refinement of no surface education, and accomplishments never unduly self-asserted, shone through the gentle gaiety of her demeanour. She was absolutely innocent of any shadow of self-interest; taste alone guided her inclinations, her competence protected her from

FRANÇOIS VI DUC DE LA ROCHEFOUCAULD
Né en M. DC. XIII. M. ou M. DC. LXXX.
Peint en Email par Petitot.
Gravé en 1770 par L. Chossard
Dessin. Graveur de L. M. Imp. et du Roi à Copenha.

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greed, and natural generosity was ever prompting her to kindly actions. Once, at a later day, when Anne of Austria was beginning to settle into the calm austerities of maturer years, and urged by some prudes about her, she sent orders for the temporary retirement of Ninon into a convent, leaving her to select the one she preferred—the tale goes that she expressed her gratitude to the exempt of the guards who delivered the message, for the choice so left her, and that she would choose the convent of the Grands Cordeliers, an establishment about to be suppressed for the scandals attaching to it; but it is far more probable that the jest originated with some acquaintance; for to make light of orders from the Court was in no wise according with Ninon's code.

That command, however, again reached her at a yet later time, and then was enforced. In Louis XIII.'s days, Ninon was often a guest at the Louvre, and on the occasion of one of the State balls given there, she was present with Rambouillet for her cavalier in chief. As she was entering her carriage to return home, she felt a pull at her mantle, and turning, she saw beside her "a little man, clad entirely in black velvet, whose smile was mocking and full of sarcasm, and his eyes shone like carbuncles. Rambouillet, seeing my terror," she wrote later, "demanded of the man what he wanted; but the Man in Black silenced him with an imperious gesture, and said to me, in a tone of profound melancholy—'You are proud of your beauty, mademoiselle, and

you are right, for it is marvellous. But alas! all these charms will one day fade. The rosy hues of your skin will die out, age will come, and bring its wrinkles. Ah, believe me! Beware! Endeavour to hinder this misfortune, for afterwards there will be nothing left to you.' So saying, he gravely saluted me, and disappeared among the arches of the colonnade."[1]

[1] De Mirecourt.

CHAPTER V

An Excursion to Gentilly—"*Uraniæ Sacrum*"—César and Ruggieri—The rue d'Enfer and the Capucins—Perditor—The Love-philtre—Seeing the Devil—"Now You are Mine!"

NINON'S pledge of eternal fidelity to Rambouillet did not hinder other friendships; and about this time she one day made an excursion to Gentilly with the Comte de Lude, intent on visiting the great magician, Perditor, who conducted there his famous incantations. She chose de Lude for her companion on this occasion, because he was an utter disbeliever. The adventure was prompted by the craze, ever latent in society, and then recently kindled to fever-heat, for magic and occultism. The theme, as old almost as the ages, is ever new, and likely to remain so until the mysteries of life and death are revealed. And some short time previously, the rumour had circulated that a man named Febroni, intensely hated by Richelieu, was endeavouring to compass the cardinal's destruction, by causing a wax image of him to be made and exposed to a slow fire, and as the image melted, so the minister's life would dwindle to the death. This was, of course, no new device of witchcraft and *diablérie*; but it served to arouse intense interest and curiosity, and the air was as full of sorcery and demonology as when the first Ruggieri practised his arts for Catherine de

Médicis, and watched the stars from the old tower-top of Blois, the observatory of the terrible queen, "*Uraniæ Sacrum.*"

Some half-dozen years before Ninon was born, a man named César and another Ruggieri, probably taking the old magician for sponsor, had been notorious as potent masters of the "Black Art." That they were credited with possessing unlimited command over the elements, and to produce thunder and lightning at will, was but a small part of his power. He could manufacture love-potions to render the indifferent one enamoured of the wooer, and insidious poisons to destroy a hated human obstacle, and perform many services of the like nature for a price, but the fees were startlingly high.

An indiscretion, only in a measure connected with his profession, brought César inside the walls of the Bastille. He had, it appeared, been accustomed to attend the Witches' Sabbath, and meeting there a great Court lady, he had, he said, induced her to listen too graciously to his soft speeches. The boasts, after his release from the old fortress, brought him condign punishment at the hands, it was said, of his Satanic chief, furious with jealousy it might be. It was on a wild March night that he came and went again with hideous din and clatter, leaving César strangled in his bed; and then making his way to the abode of Ruggieri, he despatched him in the same manner. There were some ready to contend that less supernatural agency might be answerable for these acts. On the other hand it was well known that the devil was

no stranger in Paris, having once resided in a street on the left bank of the Seine, which was named after him, the rue d'Enfer. From here he was at last ejected, thanks to a happy thought on the part of the city authorities, who handed the ground over to the Capucin brothers, and the foul fiend was heard of no more in that quarter. César extenuated his offence of magic by the assertion that he "was pestered to death by young courtiers and other young Parisians to show him the devil," and not seeing why he should have the trouble of doing so for nothing, he set his price at forty and fifty pistoles, leaving it a matter of choice whether they would face the terrible ordeal to its ending, or take flight, leaving the pistoles of course behind them. It was this latter course which had been mostly adopted.

And now, at Gentilly, dwelt one magician named Perditor, whose power was reported to be greater than that of any of his predecessors; since he possessed the secret of concocting a philtre capable of maintaining a woman's beauty and freshness to extreme age. It was the idea of obtaining this inestimable thing, which determined Ninon to pay a visit to the mighty Perditor. The chronicles of the time confirm the facts related by Ninon of her adventure, which are best told in the fashion of her own experiences:

"On entering the village, we inquired for the dwelling of the celebrated necromancer, and a guide presented himself to conduct us thither. We soon arrived in front of a yawning cavern

which was surrounded by large deep ditches. Our guide made a signal, and immediately a man dressed in red appeared on the opposite side of the ditches, and asked us what we wanted.

"'I wish for a philtre,' I replied, 'which will make my beauty last the length of my life.'

"'And I,' said the count, 'wish to see the devil.'

"'You shall both be satisfied,' replied the red man, as calmly as if we had asked the most natural thing in the world. Then he lowered a sort of drawbridge across the ditch, and, this crossed, he admitted us into the cavern, where we soon found ourselves in complete darkness. I felt not a little nervous.

"'Do not be afraid,' said the count to me; 'I have my sword with me, a dagger, and two pistols; with them I think I can defy all the sorcerers in the world.'

"After proceeding for quite five minutes along underground galleries and passages, we found ourselves in a sort of large circular chamber hewn out of the solid rock. Some resin torches cast a fitful and gloomy glare up into its vaulted roof. At one end of this hall, upon a platform draped entirely in black, was seated a personage in the garb of a magician, who appeared to be waiting for us.

"'That is the Master!' solemnly said the man in red to us.

"And he left us alone in the presence of the great sorcerer himself.

"'Approach!' cried Perditor, addressing us in a terrible voice. 'What do you wish?'

"'I wish,' murmured I, in a trembling voice, 'a philtre to preserve to me my youth and beauty all my life.'

"'Forty crowns. Pay first.'

"Taking out my purse, I laid down five louis, appalled by the defiant fierceness of his tones. The count did not wait for the questioning of the man on the platform.

"'For my part, Sir Necromancer,' he said, 'I feel greatly curious to see the devil. How much do you want for showing him to me?'

"'One hundred livres.'

"'Peste! At that price what fine benefices you must be able to bestow."

"The lord of the cavern vouchsafed no reply. He took the money from the count, which he put into a big purse hanging at his side, along with my louis. That done, he laid his hand upon a huge bell, which sounded as loud as the bourdon strokes of Notre-Dame tower-bell. At this signal, which nearly deafened us, two nymph-like young women, fairly pretty, dressed in white and crowned with flowers, rose from the ground near. Perditor pointed me out to them, handed them an empty crystal phial, and then again struck his fearful bell. The nymphs disappeared. I gathered that they had gone to mix my philtre.

"'And now,' continued the necromancer, turning to us, 'you are both decided that you will see the devil?'

"'Very decided,' said the count.

"'Your name?'

"'But is it necessary to give it to you, sir?' stammered I.

"'It is indispensable.'

"'It is Anne de L'Enclos.'

"'And I,' hastened to add my companion, 'I am called George de Sandrelles, Comte de Lude.'

"'You swear never to reveal that which is about to take place before your eyes?'

"'We swear it.'

"'You promise not to be afraid, and not to invoke heaven or the saints?'

"'We promise.'

"The magician rose; he took a long wand of ebony, approached us, and traced a large circle with it in the dust, inscribed with a number of cabalistic figures. Then he said to us—

"'You can still go away—are you afraid?'

"I wanted to answer in the affirmative, but the count cried in resolute tones—

"'Afraid of the devil? For shame! What do you take us for? Get on with you.'

"And at the same instant we heard thunderous peals—the voice of the magician sounding above the tumult. He gesticulated, shouted, and broke, in some unknown tongue, into a torrent of diabolic invocations. It made one's hair stand on end. Terror seized me. I clung convulsively to the count's arm, and implored him to leave the frightful place.

"'The time is past for it,' cried the sorcerer; 'do not cross the circle, or you are dead.'

"Suddenly, to the noise of the thunder, succeeded

a sound like the rattling of chains that were being dragged along the depths of the cavern. Then we heard dismal howlings. The necromancer's contortions continued, and his cries redoubled. He uttered barbaric words, and appeared to be in fits of frenzy. In the twinkling of an eye, we were enveloped in flames.

"'Look!' cried Perditor.

"A cry of terror broke from me, as I saw in the midst of this wild whirlwind of fire a huge black goat, loaded with glowing red chains. The howlings grew more fearful, the flames burst into frightful intensity, and a troop of hideous demons, also loaded with chains, began to dance round the goat, waving their torches, and uttering furious shouts and yells. The goat reared on to his hind legs, butted with his horns, and appeared to be the very genius of the infernal scene.

"'Ah! pardieu!' cried de Lude, 'the comedy is well played, I own; but I am curious to see the coulisses, and to examine the costumes of the actors closer.'

"He grasped his pistols, and made as if he was going to step over the circle; but at a sign from the magician, all the flames were extinguished, the goat and the demons disappeared. We were plunged once more into profound darkness. At the same moment strong arms seized us, we were dragged hurriedly along the passages, and flung outside the cavern.

"I was only too glad of this unlooked-for ending up, and did not ask to go back and get my philtre,

and I willingly left the magician in possession of my five louis.

"The count was not at all of the same mind. He insisted on penetrating to the solving of the enigma. We had been the victims of a hateful and odious charlatanism. I did not feel so convinced of that as he was, and the abominable spectacle would not quit my imagination. For the rest of that day, and the following night, I saw nothing but devils dancing and howling amid the flames."

. . . . . .

And then it was just before break of dawn, between her sleeping and waking, came once again the Man in Black. He smilingly asserted himself to Ninon, to be, beyond all doubt and juggling hocus-pocus, his Satanic Majesty, the real "Simon Pure." In calm, grave tones he offered her the choice of the three great gifts this world has to bestow—riches, grandeur, beauty—enduring beauty till all-destroying Death should claim her, and with only a momentary hesitation, Ninon chose beauty. Then in two crystal phials, like the one the charlatans had yesterday cheated her out of in the Gentilly cavern, he handed her the wondrous liquid—limpid, delicately rose-tinted; enough to last the longest lifetime, since one drop only in a wine-glass of water, to be taken after her morning bath, was all that was needed. First, however, he produced his tablets, and writing a few words on one of the pages, he bade her set her signature beneath. "Very good," he said, when she had done this. As he placed the phials in her hands, "Now you are mine," and he

added, as he laid his hand on her shoulder, that her health would remain almost unbroken through all the coming years, troops of friends and love would be ever with her, and after death the memory of her would be unfading. Once more she would see him—years hence. "Then beware and tremble; you will not have three more days to live."

And so he disappeared.[1]

In the course of their brief conversation, the Man in Black disclosed to Ninon the manner in which his impudent imitator produced his Mumbo-Jumbo terrors. Like the Comte de Lude, he did not deny them effect; but he held them so essentially vulgar, that it seemed marvellous to him how the fellow succeeded in imposing on refined and educated clients. Moreover, they had not even the recommendation of novelty. Perditor had, he explained, contrived merely to get knowledge and possession of the tricks and traps of the long since strangled César, who during his incarceration in the Bastille had entertained his gaolers with an account of the way he played his tricks, performed apparently at Gentilly also at that time and therefore rendering the way the easier to his successor, since the old quarry he had utilised and patterned about with ditches still remained. Perditor's ceremonial was identically the same with César's. The frightful cries he uttered were the signal for six men hideously masked and garbed, he kept concealed in the cavern, to spring forward, flinging out flashes of flame, and waving torches of burning

[1] De Mirecourt.

resin. Amid the flames was to be seen the monstrous goat, loaded with thick iron chains painted vermilion, to give the appearance of being red-hot. On each side, in the obscurity of the cavern, were placed two huge mastiffs, their heads fastened into wooden cases, wide at one end, and narrow at the other. Two men goaded and prodded these two poor animals, which caused them to utter the most dismal howling, filling the cavern with the appalling noise, while the goat, a most intelligent beast, and thoroughly understanding his part, played it to admiration, rattling his chains and butting his huge horns.

The devil having thus shown himself, two of the men now rush upon the unfortunate individual, and belabour him black and blue with long bags of cloth filled full of sand, and then fling him, half-dead, outside the cavern. "Then the parting advice is given him not to wish to see the devil again, and he never does, concluded César."

CHAPTER VI

Nemesis—Ninon's Theories—Wits and Beaux of the Salons—Found at Last—"The Smart Set"—A Domestic Ménage—Scarron—The Fatal Carnival—The Bond of Ninon—Corneille and *The Cid*—The Cardinal's Jealousy—Enlarging the Borders—Monsieur l'Abbé and the Capon Leg—The Grey Cardinal—A Faithful Servant.

NINON'S intrigue with the young Marquis de Rambouillet gave great offence to Madame de Rambouillet. It sheds a curious light on the manner of the great world of the time, that the doors of the marquise's house remained still open to her, yet so they did remain. The justly incensed lady contented herself with soliciting an order from the Court for the young man to rejoin his regiment in Auvergne without delay; and Ninon was left to console herself elsewhere, and to avenge as she might her annoyance at the epigrams showered upon her, not to speak of the severe blame cast upon women of society who were undeterred by any sense of propriety and the *convenable*—which she was well aware was mainly levelled at herself. All moral considerations aside, the breach of good taste is inconceivable in one who so prided herself, and generally with justice, on the observation of the general laws governing the people of her class. The hospitality of the famous mansion in the rue St Thomas du Louvre, however, was still accorded her, and if it was more chilly than formerly, Ninon

consoled herself by enlisting many who frequented the brilliant gatherings, on the side of her easy-going philosophy, and discussing its tenets with amazing frankness.

The women were not many who upheld her arguments; but the men vastly applauded and seconded her sallies against the theory of Platonic love. In her opinion, it was an impossible doctrine, and on such themes she was Madame Oracle, and her beautiful mouth opened to expound, what dog dare bark? Unless indeed it might be the cardinal. "Mademoiselle," he said, one evening when he was present, as he frequently was, in the Rambouillet salon, and Ninon ventured an observation not quite to his taste, "I never accept lessons, even when they issue from such pretty lips as yours."

The stately mansion of Rambouillet, with its magnificent grand salon, and blue chamber, the special haunt of the poets, its daintily furnished smaller chambers, and richly-draped alcoves and cosy corners, was only one among many houses entertaining the society of the world which was devoted, or assumed devotion, to art and literature. There were the Saturdays of Madame de Sablé, and notably also the receptions of Mademoiselle Scudéri. Mademoiselle de L'Enclos' own apartments were thronged on her reception nights with the company of talented and famous men and women, though that genial admirer of hers, St Evrémond, once had the temerity to criticise the beauty, or the lack of it, in the ladies of the *côtérie*. It might, of

course, as he said, arise from mere chance; but otherwise it was a mistake; since it suggested the idea that Ninon could not sufficiently prize her own beauty; and on the score of the hidden compliment the audacity was condoned. After the coolness that followed upon Ninon's *liaison* with the Marquis de Rambouillet, the society of the salon of the marquise somewhat thinned for awhile; while the salon of the rue des Tournelles was more thronged than ever. The *cachet* that admitted to all these various assemblies would appear to have been that only of fair breeding and connexions, and some intellectual pretension, though the supply of that was not necessarily very great, since the leaven of would-be wits and of absolute stupidity—the "mostly fools" Carlyle says the world is peopled with—would seem to have been even curiously large. One and all, however, were full of ambition to air the rhymes, and often senseless epigrams and dreary sonnets and conceits, generated in their miserable brains.

Perhaps the only one of this crowd of triflers who is worth recording is the Baron de Miranges. In addition to the fact that he was never known to sit still two consecutive minutes, he was supremely ugly; marked with the smallpox, he squinted, his chin was awry, his nose twisted to one side. He was the first to jest at all these defects. One day he met a man on the Pont Neuf, an entire stranger to him, and halting before him, Miranges, in a sort of transport of satisfaction, gave a joyous cry and threw himself upon the individual's neck, saying:

"Oh, sir! how charmed I am at this meeting, and for what a number of years I have been looking for you!"

"Indeed?" said the other, in a tone of astonishment. "I do not think I have the honour of knowing you."

"No. Unluckily I have met you much too late; but I look at you, I contemplate you, and I am happy."

"But why?"

"Yes, yes, indeed," replied Monsieur de Miranges; "let us embrace each other again. I have always despaired of ever finding a man uglier than myself, but now—yes, you are that man."

Not without justice, Ninon, who about this time had in more ways than one drawn unfavourable public criticism upon herself, complains that she was really less culpable, infinitely more decorously behaved in society, than many of the titled and fashionable dames, whose behaviour, scandalous as it was, passed unchallenged. They were constantly promenading in the Place Royale, chattering at the top of their voices, ogling, smoking, taking snuff, adorning their mantles and hats with knots of ribbon of various colours, each conveying a different significance, and generally comporting themselves after the manner of the lowest of their sex. Ninon de L'Enclos had made a law unto herself, a law of liberty, and she made no pretence of not abiding by it; but she rarely sinned in outward decorum, or forgot the good breeding of her station.

In the matter of de Rambouillet, if she did not

acknowledge the false step, it was probable she was made to feel conscious of it, and decided soon after to divert public attention to some other topics of scandal, by absenting herself from Paris for a while and rusticating at Loches, the estate which her aunt had left her. On reaching le Mans, she was met by the Marquis de la Châtre—an amiable man for whom Ninon had sufficient attachment and constancy to allow the good provincials to imagine they were man and wife, and the two were widely welcomed and courted.

One evening, at a supper party to which they were invited, she met Scarron. He arrived in company with some canons from the cathedral, and to her great surprise she learned from him that he now held a canonry in le Mans cathedral, bestowed upon him for the assistance of his pen, than which few were more able than his in Lorraine, in drawing up a history of the duchy of Lorraine.

To Paul Scarron, the brilliant wit, comic poet, rhymester—so admired of another erratic genius, Oliver Goldsmith, who translated his *Roman Comique*—the sunny-natured, in earlier years scandalously debauched, and always *bon vivant*—brimming with the overflow of humour that wells from the depths of a sympathetic temperament—generous, kind-hearted—to:

> "Nothing extenuate,
> Nor set down aught in malice,"

are words hardly to be more aptly applied. The sufferings of his childhood, due to the avarice of his artful stepmother, who contrived to separate

him from his father and get possession of his fortune, cast him nearly penniless upon the world, when scarcely more than a child. It was one more instance of the game, ever new, which relatives intellectually inferior, incited by envy and greed, love to play upon the unfortunate talented one, and render life one long misery and struggle at the best, provided sufficient bread is somehow come upon to retain breath. So much the brave heart and exercise of his gifts enabled the lad to acquire, and he managed to enter ecclesiastical ranks; but only to the outermost degree—not, it may be, aspiring to the priesthood, which hardly could have lost anything from one whose character and mode of life were so glaringly ill adapted for the calling. Scarron's vocation that way was worse than nil; nevertheless, in that lax time of ecclesiastical law and order, he obtained the canonry of le Mans cathedral, and thus dignified, Monsieur l'Abbé Scarron met Ninon again at the supper-table of the local receiver-general of taxes, and was more ready than ever for any lengths of wild uproariousness the chance brought him. It came just then with the Carnival, and Scarron, with one or two companions, conceived the notion of spreading a big mattress all over with goose's feathers and down; then, smearing themselves from head to foot in honey, they rolled upon the mattress until they were encased in the feathers so thickly, that the disguise was impenetrable, and they looked like some hideous monstrosities of the bird-tribe, face and all covered in the plumage. Passing up the street, followed by a huge concourse,

they made their way to Ninon's château, and forced entrance, greatly to the anger of Monsieur de la Châtre, who quickly discovered who they were, and at once denounced them. The mob, furious at the thought of a churchman of their own cathedral indulging in such wild licence, set upon the feathered monsters, and flinging them down, pommelled and beat the unprotected bodies of the unfortunate masqueraders, and plucked off every feather, pursuing them without mercy, until they were compelled to jump into the rushes of the river for protection. There they were forced to remain for hours, and two of Scarron's three companions died from the effects of the cold immersion, and the violence dealt them. Scarron himself escaped with breath, but little more. The chill and exposure brought on an illness from which he never recovered. It crippled him in every limb, and rendered him, as he himself says, an abridgment of human suffering—tied to his chair by the contraction of every muscle, in never-ending pain for all the years to come; yet never losing his gaiety, and for all the misery he had created for himself, winning the pity and the money gifts from the Court and from wealthy friends which enabled him to live in fair affluence.

A short time later the domestic felicity being enjoyed at the Loches château by Ninon and Monsieur de la Châtre was rudely broken up by a summons from Monsieur de la Châtre's family, at Besançon, to repair to the deathbed of his father. The two parted with real regret, and so much devotion on the Marquis de la Châtre's side, that

nothing would content him short of a written and signed promise from Ninon of eternal fidelity to him. She accordingly wrote on a leaf of his tablets these words—

"I swear to love you always.—NINON."

Carefully bestowing this precious bond in black and white in an innermost pocket of his vest, de la Châtre conducted Ninon back to Paris. He would have preferred to leave her in Touraine, to pass the time of his absence in the rural tranquillity of her beautiful little domain; but if Ninon desired to ruralise, was there not her charming country residence at Picpus?—and Picpus is much nearer Paris than Loches; and just then the Maréchal de Sévigné had arrived in Paris, a man of noble presence, distinguished for his recent successes in the king's service, and the young Vicomte de Turenne, already entered upon the paths of his renown, by his splendid service in Lorraine and Italy, and both, eagerly seeking introduction to Ninon, came, saw, and were conquered by her charm.

De Sévigné's rendered homage was, however, on somewhat unconventional lines, the honeyed words of his admiration being tempered with just enough fault-finding as to render it unusually piquant; but Ninon's favours, and just now especially, were in no wise exclusively bestowed on the heroes of the battlefield. She was no more *précieuse* than she was *Platonicienne;* but she was genuinely gifted with a love of letters, which had been fostered by

the excellent education her father had given her, and she entered ardently into the great intellectual movement of the time, in which the drama figured so prominently. Richelieu himself was so warm a devotee, that his ambition to excel as a dramatist equalled, if it did not surpass, his political ambition; and while jealous to the mean extent envy can reach, he did not withhold his patronage from the great genius of him who has been styled the father of the French dramatists, Pierre Corneille. Even had Richelieu not desired as he did, to make use of the brilliant talent of Corneille for his own ends, it would not have been possible for him to hold aloof amid the enthusiasm of the world of letters, and of society generally, which hailed in 1636 the production of *The Cid.*

As every time "doth boast itself above better gone," so must Corneille's name yield place in a degree to what has since been seen. Still, ever remembering his fathering of it—for his predecessors in dramatic work worthy of any name were dull and lacked artistic knowledge of their craft, and Godelet, Gamier, and others are but names now and no more — Corneille's masterpiece would challenge criticism in plenty now, placed before the delicate discrimination of the daily press of this time, or the judgment of the gallery, alike in his native country or elsewhere. It is but recently that the tragedy of a great French poet, not yet two generations passed away, revived at the Comédie Française, though reverently and finely acted, was derided and mocked at without mercy behind the

scenes by those taking part in it. Exactly what will be the opinions of critics of future generations on the dramatic productions of the early years of the twentieth century, fortunately the means will probably be lacking to know; the fact remains that the fame of Pierre Corneille is a living force and a memory for all time.

It was the fashion of that day to model plays and novels on Spanish and Italian patterns; and advised to follow this ruling, Corneille selected the subject of *The Cid*—Rodriguez—on which to base a drama, not his first by several; but while the preceding ones were held in great esteem, *The Cid* was regarded as attaining to the highest excellence, and its fame as his crowning work has ever remained by it. Some of his dramas of a later date were unsuccessful; one of his comedies, *Le Menteur* —the only one which had popularity—is best known in this country by Steele's translation of it, *The Lying Lover*.

Richelieu, stirred to dramatic ambition—finding probably that it was an art less easy than it seemed —sought the assistance of five dramatists to write up and give more effect to his tragedies; at least any other reason for such collaboration is not easy to be imagined. One of the five chosen was Corneille, who, naturally somewhat curt and abrupt in speech, did not spare to find fault with some of the details of the cardinal's work, and the concatenation of *The Cid's* success and of Corneille's frankness over *Euterpe* and *Mirame*, stirred such offence in the cardinal's jealous mind, that he endeavoured to drive a spoke in the

wheel of Corneille's car of triumph; and one of the earliest achievements of the recently constituted Académie Française was a critique on *The Cid* commanded of its members by its founder. It had no effect at all in lessening the enthusiasm of the world of letters, or of the general public for the drama. The poison did not act, in spite of the endeavours of several of the poetasters to second the pronouncements. One defect, that it was not original in plot and construction, but based on a Spanish dramatic model, was to be conceded; if defect that was which at the time was held to be almost indispensable in a play. There is nothing new under the sun. Shakespeare's comedies and tragedies alike—the English historical plays excepted—are one and all based on old legends and classic stories which he drew from Italian, and Spanish and French, and other sources that had, in their turn, sprung from tradition no longer traceable, hidden in origins lost in the lapse of centuries. Richelieu's own dramatic effusions were reproductions of classical themes. It was the grandeur of the verse of Corneille, its lofty thought, its dignity and moral conception, its depicting of conflicting passions—this it was that won the admiration, and struck home to heartfelt sympathies, in its power of presenting character, under other names, of living men and women, the contemporaries of Ninon's time, contending, suffering, striving in the stormy political atmosphere, darkening in now with the shadows of the Thirty Years' War.

In the delight of Corneille's presence in Paris,

Ninon sacrificed all the ordinary routine of her life. It was in her salon, if the chronicling of the fact is to be trusted, that Corneille read to the assembled company his manuscript of *The Cid*, all the principal members being present of the Hôtel Bourgogne, and the few other talented "rogues and vagabonds" proscribed of the Church, though ill to be spared by it, if the cardinal's plays were to have any sort of success. The Comédie Française was yet an institution of the future; and the stage of the Hôtel Bourgogne, with the two or three other theatres were not much more than glorified fair platforms, while the theatre in the rue Guénégaud ordinarily confined itself to the presentment of Chinese shadows. The drawing-room of the Louvre and of the Palais Cardinal were utilised for masques and such plays as there were, called in request for the Court and the more exalted circles of society. Richelieu's own pieces were thus performed. The drama was in transition. It was a far cry now from Clement Marot and the antics of the clerks of the Basoche upon the huge marble table of the Hall of Lost Footsteps, to the Académie Française and the Hôtel de Rambouillet; and the language of the country was undergoing changes, even as the aspect of the city itself was no longer that of a few years earlier, when Ninon first came to Paris. Then Notre-Dame was nearly surrounded by green spaces of meadowland and field and hedgerow, stretching between the streets and the grassy banks of the Isle de la Cité. Now here, and away to the Palais

de Justice; and northwards of the Louvre, streets were gathering, and houses began to crowd about the old towers of the Conciérgerie; while on the banks of the Seine, right and left, the old walls of Philip Augustus were laid low or broken up to afford room for new buildings. Behind the Louvre, far extending to the gardens and palace of the Tuileries, Richelieu's magnificent residence dominated the rue de Rivoli—the Palais Cardinal, so soon to pass as a gift to the king and take the name of the Palais Royal, till the Revolution of 1793 changed it to the Palais Égalité, and the lordly "pleasure house" of the great upholder of kingly power was cut up into gaudy shops and gaming-houses.

After the performance of *The Cid*, which took place before the king and queen, and Court, and a vast company of illustrious persons, Corneille returned home to Rouen, to pursue the great career he was now launched upon. The fulminations of the cardinal through the Académie Française far from proving destructive to his fame, had probably cast a brighter lustre on it. "I never undertake anything without well first considering, but once I have resolved, I go straight to my aim; I throw all down that is in my path; I mow down all, and I cover all with my red robes," he once said, and it was no empty boast. Yet the ruling found its exception; his rancour and jealousy did its worst, but it could not crush Corneille. It did not at all events do so. Even for Richelieu it might have been dangerous and impolitic. Gaston d'Orléans, the

king's brother, who belonged to the party of the queen, threw in his influence to support anything he dared in opposition to the cardinal—and at this time Gaston was a frequent visitor at Ninon's house. He invited himself one evening to dinner with her, attended by several gentlemen, and Ninon, who was kept in countenance by her friend, Marion Delorme, and another lady, entertained her royal guest with an elegant repast of fish, flesh and fowl, although she had ventured to remind "Monseigneur" that, being the season of Lent, it was a questionable proceeding to have anything but dishes of the first served up. Gaston, however, had insisted, especially in the matter of roast capon, and good wine—*cela va sans dire.* Whether the wine was partly answerable, or it was merely the manners of the time that prompted one of the guests—Monsieur de Boisrobert, my lord cardinal's secretary—who was fingering the leg-bone of a fowl, to fling it out of window at the head of Monsieur l'Abbé Dufaure, the venerable dean of St Sulpice, that was what he did. The abbé was a Jesuit priest, and the scandal of insult to him was doubled by the sin of eating meat in Lent. Monseigneur and his companions finished the evening by adjourning to the house of Monsieur la Navarre, a neighbour of Ninon's, and breaking up the furniture. Then the prince himself sent for the magistrate, and the functionary arriving, demanded to be informed which was the culprit. The unfortunate neighbour, who did not know who Gaston was, pointed him out, and forthwith six archers were sent for, who laid hands on the prince,

and he was threatened with handcuffing if he did not immediately go quietly to prison. Upon this the gentlemen in attendance, hearing the uproar, entered, and with profoundest respect proceeded to inquire what had happened, addressing Monseigneur by name. Terrified out of his senses at what he had done, the magistrate besought pardon, which the prince gravely granted, not without commanding him to make *amende honorable* by holding a lighted wax taper in his hand, and, on bended knees, confessing his crime before all and individually of the women of the household, who were summoned to attend for the purpose.

So much for Monseigneur's little amusement: it was Ninon who was the sufferer. The insulted abbé complained to his Superior, who complained to the magistrate of the district, and from mouth to mouth the story flew. Not one man in black, but constant contingents of the black-soutaned fraternity haunted the rue des Tournelles, and invaded Ninon's apartments, subjecting her to such severe inquisition about her affairs generally, that it became unendurable, and she wrote to the prince in severe reproach for allowing the blame of his folly to burden and annoy her. Whereupon Gaston sent two of his friends to mollify the wrath of the magistrate, who tore up the Jesuit Superior's letter of complaint. But the scandal only aggravated the soreness and complications of the opposing parties of the Court, and it made an additional grievance for Richelieu against Gaston; though, on the other hand, it was Boisrobert, his own secretary, who was also his own

jester-in-chief, who had been at the bottom of the offence, so that the affair cut both ways, and the cardinal may have preferred to see it hushed up.

It was about this time that Richelieu lost by death the man he called his right hand—Père Joseph, the Capucin friar—in other words, "The Grey Cardinal," as he was nicknamed; but in fact and deed the poor man never even received the bishopric long promised, never bestowed. Richelieu himself was already in failing health, worn by stress and anxiety for the care of the vast structure of kingly power he had built up and sustained, as it were, by his own hand, that was against so many, and Louis himself was almost as much a nonentity as any of the *rois fainéants* of old days. It is almost impossible to realise that he and his false-hearted, selfish brother should have been the sons of the dauntless Henry of Navarre.

Louis was not vicious; it was his valetudinarian melancholy temperament which appears to have rendered him indifferent to ordinary human interests. He made less than no pretence of affection for his Spanish wife, for whose bright glances other men would have staked existence. For her, Buckingham forgot honour and duty to his own royal master, and did not spare compromising her repute. That is a page of history that remains sealed. How far it affected Louis's feelings towards her through the rest of his life, remains an open question, or whether from the beginning, love and mutual inclination were at fault. "The wind bloweth where it listeth," and the beauty and

attractions of Anne of Austria may never have struck a responsive chord in the king's heart. He was not destitute of sentiment. More than once he strove to fill the dreary void with the sympathy of other women of repute about the Court, and, in one instance at all events, not unsuccessfully ; but he was not one to win love and friendship generally ; and the consciousness of this chilled his manner still more, and threw him back upon himself. Gaston d'Orléans, with all his grave faults, had at least quicker outward intelligence and sufficient animation to win some extensive suffrages of the gentler sex, notably of Anne herself, who tolerated his attentions and coquetted with him up to a certain point ; though how far this was policy, or from real sentiment, Court intrigues veil too entirely to attempt to determine, and the jealousy of Richelieu, himself enamoured of the queen, had soon put an end to all the aspirations of the two dukes. "There is no such word as fail," Richelieu was often heard to say, and he did not fail to put his foot down very decisively when a league was formed, which the queen herself was said to favour, whose end and aim was to depose Louis the Just, crown Gaston, and give him Anne of Austria to wife.

"I should not have sufficiently gained by the change," was, however, Anne's reply, when the accusation of her desire for this was made against her in the course of the rigorous inquiry and treatment to which she and her friends were subjected. If on account alone of that time, years back now, when Gaston, to save himself, permitted one of his noblest

adherents, Chalais, to perish on the scaffold at Richelieu's command, Monsieur was not likely to be very favourably regarded by her. Nearly half a score of years had passed since the brave man had died in the flower of his life, tortured and hacked by countless bungling strokes of a creature found at last, among the dregs of the prison, to do the hideous task which the professional headsman managed to evade by absenting himself and remaining *perdu*. In the interval, the queen's mother had been effectually, and for ever, banished from France. "The Day of Dupes" had come and gone, leaving Richelieu all-triumphant; but still the contest raged, and the virulence of the minister against the queen broke furiously on the pretext he found at last, of discovering that she was keeping up a private correspondence with the King of Spain, and the cardinal infant, her two brothers, and also with persons in Madrid and Brussels, whose friendship she valued—the more, doubtless, for the isolation and lack of affection and harshness surrounding her. It was a boast of Richelieu's, that with only two lines of an innocent man's writing he could ruin him. Naturally, therefore, however innocent the correspondence, Anne was anxious to hold her letters uninspected by the cardinal, and she kept them in her own private oratory chamber in the Benedictine convent of the Val de Grâce, in the rue St Jacques, which she had founded. The letters, on their arrival, were received by one of the nuns, who placed them away in a closet to await the queen's coming, and her replies to them were forwarded

from thence. But Richelieu's spies were at work; they swarmed of course in Paris; and before long they scented out the secret correspondence, and Richelieu informed the king of it, holding up before His Majesty's dreary imagination all the terrors of national peril it signified. The alarmed king hurried the queen out of Paris to the Château of Chantilly, where she was confined to her own rooms and compelled to listen to a string of rigid interrogation from the chancellor. She was in a cruelly forlorn situation; for, in fear of Richelieu's anger and the activity of his spies, the courtiers and following of the royal pair did not venture so much as to lift their eyes to her window as they passed. For her own servants, they had been at once disposed of in various prisons; while the chancellor proceeded to ransack the convent of Val de Grâce for more papers and letters. But it was labour lost, which possibly was no more than he expected; since it is believed that the queen had warning from him of his intended visit, and the documents, for all they might be worth, were safe in the care of Madame de Sourdis. The alarm and suspicion intensified, when there was found upon the person of la Porte, the queen's confidential servant, a letter from her to the Duchess of Chevreuse, long exiled. La Porte was thereupon, as a man of strict honesty and fidelity to his royal mistress, locked away in one of the towers of the Bastille, and all the efforts to draw from him anything incriminating the queen, were absolutely abortive; though Richelieu employed every art to shake him, from promises

and emoluments, to threats of torture, which were rendered more real to his imagination, by his being taken to the torture-chamber for a sight of its equipments.

Fortunately for him, a great event was at hand, which marvellously changed the aspect of political affairs. The queen, after twenty-two years of childlessness, was in a situation of promise to give an heir to the throne. Then Richelieu relaxed la Porte's durance so far as to permit his retiring to Saumur, where he remained till the queen recalled him, on the death of the cardinal, now shadowing in, bringing with it the terrible tragedy which was the last act and deed of his hand.

CHAPTER VII

Mélusine — Cinq-Mars—An Ill-advised Marriage—The Conspiracy—The Revenge—The Scaffold—A Cry from the Bastille—The Lady's Man—"The Cardinal's Hangman"—Finis—Louis's Evensong—A Little Oversight—The King's Nightcap—Mazarin—Ninon's Hero.

SOME few miles from Tours, along the banks of the Loire, at one of its most beautiful parts above Saumur, stands the little town of St Médard, better known as Cinq-Mars. A ruined castle crowns the heights above. It was the ancestral home of the d'Effiats, a noble family of long lineage; and before their coming, tradition told of its being the dwelling of Mélusine the *fée*, the beautiful snake-woman, who was the wife of Raymond, Count de Lusignan, placed under the terrible spell of transformation into a snake, from the waist downwards, every seventh night, for having immured her father in a rock-bound cavern, for cruelty to her mother. Disobeying Mélusine's command, never to intrude upon her on those fatal Saturday nights, Raymond discovered the appalling reason for it, and in his rage cast her forth. The despairing cry that broke from her then, is still to be heard of stormy nights above the river; and it may be, mingles with the lamentations of the mourners over the deed of blood which was enacted in after centuries when Louis the Just was king.

The young lord of the castle then, was the

son of the Maréchal Cinq-Mars. He was scarcely more than a youth; for he was but nineteen when Richelieu introduced him at Court, loading him with favours, causing him to be made the royal master of the horse, and otherwise specially recommending him to the notice of Louis, who conceived so vast a liking for him, that it was even touched with some real warmth; and Cinq-Mars, handsome, gallant, distinguished, brave, and not a little spoiled by the splendour of his existence, but amiable and generous-hearted, beloved by his friends—of whom a dear one was de Thou, the son of the great historian—basked in all the full sunshine of his young life. The pale, stern cardinal, attenuated by bodily suffering, and more than ever soured by care, was hardly likely to win much love from a gay butterfly of a creature like the young marquis, and before long Cinq-Mars came to know from Louis's own lips, that he privately hated Richelieu, a hate nourished by his deadly fear of him.

Meanwhile, Cinq-Mars had cast amorous eyes upon Marion Delorme, the cardinal's protégée. Marion, still beautiful, though no longer young—being in fact double the age of this her latest admirer—returned his passionate affection, and, dazzled by the prospect of being his wife—for his infatuation impelled him to seek her as such—she braved the consequences of her protector's wrath, and the two were secretly married. Richelieu, from whom nothing could long be hidden, was furious; he had planned a brilliant alliance for

the king's young favourite, who had shortly before leagued himself with the queen's party; Gaston d'Orléans, the Duc de Bouillon—burning to supplant the cardinal-minister—and others—and they entered into correspondence with Olivarez, the Spanish prime-minister, which resulted in a treaty of alliance between him and the conspiring enemies of the cardinal. Louis had for some time past treated Richelieu with coldness; and Richelieu, suspecting the cause of it, left Paris, and went to Tarascon, to lie in wait till his spies were able to place him in full possession of every detail of the plot, and of a copy of the treaty. Then, disabled by illness and infirmity, he desired to see the king, who travelled for the interview from Perpignan, where he was then staying, and all the thunder of the cardinal's reproaches and wrath was flung upon him. Apparently with justice, Louis succeeded in justifying himself, on the plea of ignorance, and the king departed again, enjoining everybody to obedience to Richelieu as if he were himself.

After their marriage, Marion and Cinq-Mars went to the castle on the Loire, where they spent a brief period of delight. Only the servants of the household were there, and Cinq-Mars was their lord. They showed willing, even delighted, obedience to all his behests; but the marquise his mother returned home somewhat unexpectedly, and her anger at the stolen marriage equalled in its way that of Richelieu himself. Doubtless this fomented the affair to a yet speedier issue, and

Cinq-Mars was arrested, and along with him, his friend de Thou, who was entirely innocent of complicity in the plot. The two were taken into the presence of Richelieu at Tarascon (a place old stories tell named after one Tarasque, "a fearful dragon who infested the borders of the Rhone, preying upon human flesh, to the universal terror and disturbance"), and hence his dying Eminence—for death was very near—commanded them to be placed, tied and bound, in a boat fastened behind his own, in which he was returning to Paris by the waterway of the Rhone, as far as Lyons. There, being disembarked, the two young victims were led immediately to a hastily-erected scaffold, and there bravely they met their fate by the headsman's axe—de Thou guilty of refusing to betray his friend, and Cinq-Mars' crime not proved, suffering mainly from the cowardly depositions laid against him by the Duke of Orléans. Then Richelieu continued his triumphal way to Paris, where in his magnificent palace he died; and during his last agonies, the king was seen to smile at what he called "Death's master-stroke of policy."

There was a letter, written three days before the cardinal's death, found among his papers. It was dated from the Bastille, and it consisted of one bitter reproach of his injustice to the writer, in keeping him immured in the terrible place for eleven years. It was a letter of some length, and an eloquently written appeal for release. "There is a time, my lord," it began, "when man ceases

to be barbarous and unjust; it is when his approaching dissolution compels him to descend into the gloom of his conscience, and to deplore the cares, griefs, pains and misfortunes which he has caused to his fellow-creatures. Had I," the unhappy man, whose name was Dessault, goes on to say, "performed your order, it would have condemned my soul to eternal torment, and made me pass into eternity with blood-stained hands. . . . I implore you, my lord, order my chains to be broken before your death-hour comes,—permit yourself to be moved by the most humble prayer of a man who has ever been a loyal subject to the king."

This letter bore date of December 1st; on December 4th, the cardinal died. It is not known whether he ever saw it. After his death, it came into the hands of those on whom the power now devolved, and Dessault, far from gaining his release, was kept in the Bastille till the year of 1692, after being a prisoner for sixty-one years. Such remnant of life as may have remained to him, is one too forlorn and dreary to contemplate.

And to this piteous appeal were added the sobs and frenzied reproaches of Marion Delorme, who found access to the death-chamber, just as the cardinal was about to receive the Viaticum.

A gentleman named de Saucourt was a slave to Ninon's charms at this time, causing a vast amount of envy among her friends. He was a man of refinement and brilliant wit, so raved

about by the ladies, that Benserade composed this quatrain upon him—

> "Contre se fier demon voyez vous aujourd'hui
> Femme qui tienne?
> Et toutes cependant sont contentes de lui,
> Jusqu' à la sienne."

Ninon, however, was then suffering great distress of mind at the terrible fate of Cinq-Mars, reproaching herself not a little for the light, thoughtless way in which she had half encouraged Marion Delorme, half warned her off from accepting the young man's rash proposition to make her his wife; for Marion had seriously consulted her in the matter. It came to light after Cinq-Mars' death that it was Gaston d'Orléans himself who had in his possession the original of the treaty with Olivarez, and he had had the baseness to hand this to Laffemas, the infamous procureur-general and chief tool of Richelieu, when the cardinal was bent on a man's destruction. Laffemas earned the distinction of being called the cardinal's hangman-in-chief. No one stretched out a finger to help the Chevalier de Jars, whom Richelieu kept in the Bastille for two years, on the charge of being in the secrets of Anne of Austria's connections with Spain. It was in vain that de Jars produced absolute proof of his innocence, and Laffemas added insults and threats to the interrogatory he subjected him to. Under a strong guard, de Jars one Sunday obtained leave to attend Mass at St Gervais, where he knew the wretched creature would be, and as he was about to kneel at the

altar to receive the communion, de Jars, with a bound, sprang at him, seized him by his *pourpoint*, and dragging him down the nave of the church, flung him outside the door. "Away with thee!—away from here, cowardly hypocrite!" he cried. "Do not soil this holy place with thy foul presence," and the poisonous reptile crawled away, while de Jars, turning to the officiating priest, said—"And you, my father, did you not know to whom you were about to give the Body of our Lord? To an iniquitous judge—another Judas—an abomination!"

Finally de Jars obtained his release, and spent his later life in peace and happiness, but not before he had been made to mount the scaffold itself. As he was about to lay his head upon the block, calmly defiant, Laffemas, who had got up the scene to terrify de Jars into a confession, approached and besought him, in consideration of the pardon he had brought him, to disclose all he knew; but he received scant satisfaction on the point, since de Jars, according to some authorities, persisted in his refusal and defiance of the monster. According to another account, the suffering and tension of mind he had endured temporarily deprived him of consciousness, and for some days he lay in a state of exhaustion, from which he only gradually recovered.

And those were but instances of the cardinal's tyranny, and there was so little his red robe had not covered, sufficiently at all events for him to die in his bed. And the magnificent tomb, joint work of two great artists, that covers the spot where he was laid in the church of the Sorbonne, bears

the recumbent statue of the cardinal, sustained by Religion and weeping angels.

Whether Louis, the king, shed any tears, is not specially recorded. They could hardly, in any case, have been more than of the crocodile kind ; since he was so very visibly seen to smile more than once during the passing away of his great minister. In the days when Vitry relieved him of Concini by assassination, Louis thanked him warmly for the service. "Now I am king, Vitry," he said. But it had not been for long, except in name ; for he had only been free to become the slave of Richelieu, and now his own life was ebbing fast away, not, apparently, to his very great regret. Those last days were sorely troubled at the thought of his mother, who had died in exile at Cologne. He put the blame of this on Richelieu, and made all the reparation now possible, by ordering prayers throughout the kingdom for the repose of her soul. This seemed to bring him some tranquillity, of mind. He loved music, and he composed for himself a *De Profundis* to be chanted when his last hour should arrive. Seated one day at the window of the Château of St Germains, he pointed out the route which was best for the funeral cortége to follow, to reach St Denis, and reminded of a turn of the road which was awkward to pass, bidding care be taken to keep the hearse well in hand.

The death of Richelieu in no way softened the strained relations and conjugal coldness between the king and queen. On the day of the child's birth, Louis was about to leave the queen without

bestowing the embrace customary on such occasions, until he was reminded of his omission, which only a stretch of courtesy might call forgetfulness.

The little Louis, who was in his fifth year at the time of the king's death, does not seem greatly to have interested him or afforded him any satisfaction; while the child rather shrank from him, notably when he saw him in his nightcap. Then he broke into piercing screams of terror. This the king laid, with all her other misdeeds, at the queen's door. He declared that she prompted the little boy to his objections.

It was a pitiable ending to a melancholy existence—inexpressibly lonely, for in those last months, Anne left him entirely to himself. Less desolate than the king, finding distraction for ennui in the society of her ladies, and the gentlemen of her own little Court, among whom Monsignor Giulio Mazarini figured ever more and more prominently.

Previously to Richelieu's death, the handsome, fascinating Mazarin had been a constant frequenter of Ninon's *réunions;* but from these he soon withdrew almost entirely, in favour of the dazzling metal to be found in the Louvre, for there it rang of ambitions, which there was every chance of finding fully satisfied. His first master-stroke was to set aside the late king's will—which constituted a counsel of regency, himself being chief of the counsel, which he had himself recommended to Louis — making Anne regent, with himself for prime-minister. The king was dead, Louis XIV. but a small child, and for Mazarin it was

"Long live the Queen!" while Ninon found ample consolation in the devotion of her splendid hero, Louis de Bourbon, the great Condé, Duc d'Enghien.

Hitherto love had been a fragile toy for her, hanging about her by the lightest of chains made to be broken. For Condé, the sentiment lay deeper, nourished by the breath of adulation surrounding him when he returned, victorious over the Spaniards, from the field of Rocroi; and she was fired to flames of admiration and of delight in his distinguished presence. Handsome, amiable, gallant, to Ninon and to France he was as a demi-god.

CHAPTER VIII

"Loving like a Madman"—A Great Transformation—The Unjust Tax—Parted Lovers—A Gay Court, and A School for Scandal and Mazarin's Policy—The Regent's Caprices—The King's Upholsterer's Young Son—The Théâtre Illustre—The Company of Monsieur and Molière.

"A MAN of sense may love like a madman, but never like a fool." It is the dictum of François de la Rochefoucauld, and must have been framed from his deep attachment to Condé's sister, Madame de Longueville, one of the most charming of the women of the great world at that time, and bound by ties of close friendship with Ninon.

It was no one-sided love, no case of the one who loves, and the one who merely consents to it; but mutual, and as passionate, as certainly for a time the flame was pure, shining with a clear, unflecked radiance.

Madame de Longueville, who was wedded to an old man, was singularly fascinating, from her gentle manners and amiability. Her face was not strictly beautiful, and bore traces of the smallpox, the cruel scourge then of so many beautiful faces; her eyes were full of a softened light, and she had the gift of a most sweet voice, while her smile was gentle and irresistibly winning. The dreamy, romantic, somewhat melancholy-natured de la Rochefoucauld's heart was laid at her feet in whole and undivided adoration. For their conscious love, each

strove against the temptation, she so earnestly, that she shut herself away from all chance of so much as seeing him for a little while. But Ninon slipped in with her philosophy. It was quite true, she argued to Madame de Longueville, that there were grave considerations to be respected—the indissoluble tie of marriage, *convenances* to be observed—all these; but to hide herself away, to refuse the unhappy prince the alleviation of gazing at her, of exchanging a few fleeting words—no, it was monstrously absurd. The very *Platoniciens* did not go such lengths. No, if complete happiness could not be theirs, at least a smile, a glance, was permitted; and Ninon's counsel wound up with a suggestion to the disconsolate prince, that he should try what a little note to the woman he adored would effect, and he wrote—"Show yourself—be beautiful, and at least let me admire you."

And Ninon delivered the billet, and its effect was marvellous. It conquered the young duchess's natural timidity and retiring disposition. She took courage; she assumed her rightful place in the world; she appeared at the Louvre; she kept open house and gave brilliant receptions; she took her seat on the *tabouret* of the duchesses; her toilettes were magnificent; she shone brilliantly in conversation, and began to take part in Court intrigues; ere long very actively.

"With two lines of a man's writing," had said Mazarin's great predecessor, "I could condemn him"; and with two lines of that magical pen of the Count de la Rochefoucauld, Madame de Longueville

became another woman. As in the matter of her warm attachment to her lover, she was constant in her politics; while Louis de Condé, all-conquering at Rocroi, yielded himself captive to the charms of Ninon de L'Enclos—a veritable lion in love; not so blindly, however, that he was insensible to the wrongs of the people, upon whom a tax had been levied of a specially hateful kind. It was called the Toisé, and was a revival of an old edict long fallen into desuetude. To the Italian, d'Eméri, to whom Mazarin had entrusted the control of public finances, was due its discovery and resuscitation. This edict forbade the enlargement of the borders of Paris, and as recently new buildings had been, and were being, in course of construction far and wide, the owners of these were threatened with confiscation of their materials, unless they consented to pay for their newly-erected houses and other buildings, a rate regulated by measurement of the size of them. This pressed cruelly on the people. Loud murmurs were excited. The Parliament expostulated, and the Toisé was withdrawn. It was the first stone slung by the Fronde. Condé's indignation was great; and one day, in the rue St Antoine, he laid flat with his sword the body of some wretched collector who had snatched away a child's cradle from a poor woman. His act gave great offence to the queen, who saw in it defiance of Mazarin. Both at home and abroad, there was plenty stirring to keep existence from stagnating; but for a few brief delightful weeks the Duc d'Enghien sought retirement and tranquillity

in his château of Petit Chantilly, in company with Ninon, who left the rue des Tournelles dwelling to take care of itself. It was the iniquitous Toisé which broke in upon their content; for the queen sent for the duke, to consult him in the emergency created by the cardinal favourite.

After the Toisé prologue, however, the opening scenes of the inglorious turmoil of the Fronde did not see Condé; for Austria once more took up arms, and he lost not a moment in hastening to the frontier. If it is indeed a fact that Ninon accompanied him thither in the guise of a young aide-de-camp, mounted on a fiery charger, it was but to re-enact her former exploits; and Ninon was nothing if not daring. That her presence on the field of Nordlingen could have been really anything but exceedingly encumbering, is more than imaginable. At all events Condé soon begged her to return to Paris, in order to go and console his sister, Madame de Longueville, who had been summoned to attend his father, the Duc de Condé, in an illness threatening to be fatal. Arrived at Paris, she found the sufferer very much better, and writing to inform the Duc d'Enghien of this pleasant intelligence, she begged to be allowed to return to him. The duke, however, replied that it was hardly worth while; as he should soon be back. To pass the tedium of his absence, Ninon resumed her *réunions*, finding pleasant distraction in the society of her friends, among which were two ladies distinguished for their birth and undoubted talents, scarcely less than notorious, even in those

days, for their openly lax mode of life. One of these was Madame de la Sablière, a notable member of the Hôtel de Rambouillet *côtérie*. A really brilliant mathematician, she was at least equally skilful in the science of love—so ardent a student, that one day her uncle, a grave magistrate, scandalised out of all endurance at her ways, remonstrated severely, reminding her that the beasts of the field observed more order and seasonable regulation in their love-affairs.

"Ah, dear uncle," said the gifted lady, "that is because they *are* beasts."

Madame de Chevreuse was the other specially chosen spirit of her own sex Ninon now consorted with. After the death of Richelieu, who had exiled her at the time of the Val de Grâce affair, she was allowed to return to France, attended by the Abbé de Retz, Paul de Gondi, whom Louis XIII., on his deathbed, had appointed coadjutor to the new archbishopric of Paris. De Retz had himself aspired to the archbishopric, and swore that he would obtain a cardinalate.

The Court was now brilliantly gay. The gloomy and sombre atmosphere of Louis XIII. and of Richelieu's day faded all in a succession of balls and fêtes and every sort of festivity. Anne of Austria enlarged the south side of the Louvre, and Grimaldi and Romanelli adorned the chambers and galleries with their exquisite skill. Poussin, whose friezes terminated the ends of the great gallery, had had apartments assigned him in the Louvre, in order to carry on his work with greater

facility; but he had retired in displeasure at the criticisms of his brother-artists, and went to Rome, where he spent the rest of his life, leaving in Paris immortal memories of his genius, among them the altarpiece for the chapel of St Germain en Laye, and the mournful Arcadian Shepherd, "*Et in Arcadia Ego.*"

So the never-ending round of gaiety was set in motion by Mazarin, and Anne of Austria was the regent. Anne, still handsome, and by nature frivolous under her somewhat cold Spanish demeanour—surely a born coquette, delighting in show and magnificence, none the less that she had so long lived under repression. The queen, apparently, was the reigning power; but it was the crafty prime-minister who pulled the strings, and set the puppets dancing and fiddling, and amorously intriguing, so that they should leave him to carry on his politics, and mount to the heights of his ambition and power in his own unhindered way. Unlike his great predecessor, he was handsome, and good-natured in manner, and therefore an ornament in those brilliant assemblies. Wrote St Evrémond—

"J'ai vu le temps de la bonne régence,
Temps ou régnait une heureuse abondance,
Temps où la ville aussi bien que la cour
Ne respirait que les jeux et l'amour.
Une politique indulgente
De notre nature innocente
Favorisait tous les désirs
Tout dégoût semblait légitime;
La douce erreur ne s'áppélait point crime,
Les vices délicats se nommait des plaisirs."

Very pleasant and entertaining the world of society was then; and seasoned as it was with even unusual spice of malice and spite, scandal was rife. Among others, the stepmother of Madame de Chevreuse, Madame de Montbazon, who was married to the old Duc de Rohan, was a past-mistress in the gentle art of making mischief; and where the material was insufficient, she manufactured it without scruple. In this way she nearly succeeded in bringing a rift into the love-harmonies of Henri de la Rochefoucauld and his adored Madame de Longueville, by means of sheer, brazen lying, alleging that certain letters of Madame de Longueville, which had been found, had dropped from the pocket of Coligny. It was a pitiful fabrication, and Madame de Montbazon—of whom de Retz, in his Memoirs, says "I never saw any person showing in her vices less respect for virtue"—did not come out of it with very flying colours, for all her best efforts at effrontery, and she received an order from Mazarin to retire to Tours. The letters, in effect, proved to be not those of Madame de Longueville at all; and the pocket they dropped out of, was not Coligny's. It was altogether an affair of another pair of lovers.

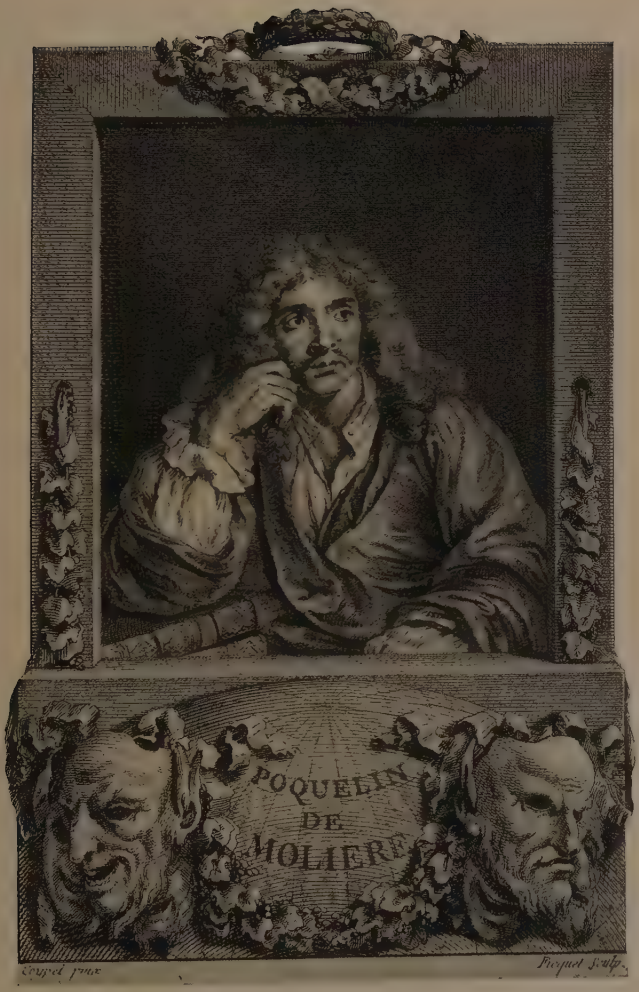
The embellishments of the Louvre were still not completed, before the queen decided not to reside in it. She began to recall, rather tardily it would seem, all the lugubrious memories of her past life connected with the palace; and she established herself in the magnificent Palais Royal—originally the Palais Cardinal.

In all those festivities, Ninon took prominent part. Ever philosophical, she thus consoled herself for the prolonged absence of the Duc d'Enghien, an absence which had, moreover, not intensified the sentiments of adoration she at first conceived for him. It was but Ninon's way. She had begun to see small defects in the case-armour of the perfection of her Mars. Her acquaintance with the dead languages supplied her with the Latin proverb, "*vir pilosus, aut libidinum aut fortis.*" "Now Esau was a hairy man," and the Duc d'Enghien was also *vir pilosus*, and Ninon taxed him with being a greater warrior than an ardent wooer, and the passion cooled rapidly; but the friendship and mutual liking ever remained.

Ninon employed Poquelin, upholsterer to the king, in the furnishing of her elegant suite of apartments. His shop was in the rue St Honoré, and there was born his son, Jean Baptiste, an intelligent, rather delicate-looking little boy, whom he duly educated and trained for his own trade. Young Jean Baptiste, however, fairly submissive and obedient, was also very fond of reading and writing, the only two acquirements his father thought necessary for assisting the chair and table-making the boy's future was destined for. Fortunately he had a very kind grandfather who loved the drama, and sometimes he would take little Jean Baptiste with him to see the performances at The Hôtel Bourgogne. Poquelin père looked with distrust on these excursions, thinking that he saw in the lad, as undoubtedly he did, growing aversion to the upholstery vocation, and a

fast developing passion for tragedy and comedy—comedy very markedly—and the boy's delight in study and books generally, created a disturbance in the good upholsterer's mind, which culminated in distress, when it became certain beyond all question, that young Jean's liking was as small for cabinet-making as it was unconquerable for literature. He was at that time about fourteen years old, and he carried about with him a small comedy he had composed called *l'Amour Médecin*, which Ninon one day, when he came to assist his father at her house, detected, rolled up under his arm. Won by her kind smiles, young Poquelin was induced to allow her to look at it, and she, no mean critic, saw such promise in it, that she showed it to Corneille—who was then staying with her, pending the representation of *The Cid.* Corneille warmly seconded her estimate of the boy's promise of unusual dramatic gifts; and after great demur, Poquelin yielded to the good grandfather's persuasions to send him to college. Several helping hands, Ninon among them, contributed to the necessary funds for this new career, and Jean Baptiste became a pupil of the Jesuits at Clermont. There he studied for five years, in the same class with Armand de Bourbon, Prince de Conti, the youngest brother of Madame de Longueville, who promised Ninon the special protection and friendship of Armand, and of the college preceptors, a promise that was ever faithfully held by; and the celebrated teacher Gassendi took him under his special care, with two other gifted lads confided to him.

At the end of the five years, Jean Baptiste was forced to resume his old occupation, on account of his father's increasing infirmities. But it was not for long. Richelieu's love of letters, and of the drama especially, brought him knowledge of young Poquelin's talent, and made the difficult way of literature easier for him; for the theatre was beginning to flourish. There was no regular company of actors in Paris until the coming of Corneille. Only a few of the "rogue and vagabond" wearers of the sock and buskin came and went, selling their plays, when they could find buyers, for some ten crowns apiece. The comedies of Corneille caused the establishment of a dramatic troupe in the city, and then it was that young Poquelin, leaving the upholstery to the dogs, established a small company of young men—"stage-struck" as the mockers were pleased to say, in this instance guided however by the sterling judgment of Jean Baptiste, truly dramatically gifted, in the Faubourg St Germain. They called it the Illustrious Theatre—(l'Illustre Théâtre). So through the years of the ignoble strife of the Fronde, when times were arid for real literary talent, Poquelin acted and composed little comedies, mainly for the provinces. Travelling with his company to Languedoc, where the Prince de Conti happened to be staying on his estates, Poquelin produced before him several of his pieces, afterwards finding their world-wide renown, *l'Étourdi*, *le Dépit Amoureux*, and others. The Prince de Conti introduced him to Monsieur, the only brother of Louis XIV.; and in a



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short time there came a day of days when the command of their Majesties reached the actor-manager, to give a representation in the chamber of the Guards in the old Louvre. After the performance of this long five-act piece, Poquelin—who had followed the custom of the actors of his time, had taken another name, and selected Molière—stepped to the front, and begged His Majesty's permission to play a short one-act piece. It was *le Docteur Amoureux*. This is possibly the origin of the custom, still so frequently observed, of the "Curtain-raiser."

Now established at Paris, Molière's company, which he styled the *Troupe de Monsieur*, his patron, was accorded the Salle of the Palais Royal, for the representation of his piece. It had been originally constructed for the cardinal's tragedy of *Mirame*, and "The chamber," says Voltaire, "for dramatic purposes, is as bad as the piece for which it was built."

Molière had a very agreeable personality. He was a little above medium height, well-built and of noble presence. His gait was dignified, his nose and mouth were large, and his lips full; his complexion was dark with black, thick eyebrows, and these he could control to giving his face all sorts of comic expressions. His manner was gentle, pleasing and kindly. He loved to speak, and when he read his plays to his company, he liked them to bring their children, so that he might study their ways and actions.

Molière, having the good or the ill fortune, as it

may be, to become such a distinguished public favourite, had his fair number of enemies among his many friends. His chief detractors were, of course, to be found among the bad authors and the great unacted; also the "unco' guid" tried to sting him hard, and in a measure succeeded—as when do they not when their poison is dropped upon sensitive natures? But the warmth of the Sun-King's admiration and patronage greatly shielded him. His Majesty bestowed a canonry on his son.

Molière had a physician, Mauvilain. It was rather an unfortunate name, and one day when he was dining with the king, Louis asked him about him. "You have a doctor," he said; "what does he do for you?"

"Sire," replied Molière, "we gossip together; he prescribes me remedies; I do not take them—and I am cured."

That Ninon was proud of the brilliant man she had so signally helped to befriend as a lad, may well be conceived, and whenever a new piece was produced, she was always there to witness it, in one of the most honoured places reserved for her.

CHAPTER IX

The Rift in the Lute—In the Vexin—The Miracle of the Gardener's Cottage—Italian Opera in Paris—Parted Lovers—"Ninum"—Scarron and Françoise d'Aubigné—Treachery—A Journey to Naples—Masaniello—Renewing Acquaintances—Mazarin's Mandate.

AGAIN victorious at Nordlingen, the Duc d'Enghien, now Prince de Condé, for his father was now dead, returned to Paris—but not to Ninon. She had given great offence to his family by permitting de la Rochefoucauld and Madame de Longueville to meet at her house, and Condé sternly reproached her for the indiscretion; hence the tie between them was broken—perhaps merely a little sooner than otherwise; for the distinction of winning the admiration of the hero of the hour had played for Ninon a very powerful part in the *liaison*. And after all, she preferred to receive homage more than to offer it; for though she liked to ruffle it in masculine attire, she was a very woman; and taking her heart back again, she permitted it to be captured by the Marquis de Villarceaux, who had sued for long past. Villarceaux was handsome and agreeable, but he had a serious defect in Ninon's eyes: he was fair, and a fat man or a fair man she ordinarily found detestable. Still he was eloquent, and she allowed herself to be persuaded to go and rusticate with him in the Vexin, as the guest of a friend of the Marquis, Monsieur de Vicariville. This gentleman found

great pleasure in discoursing on philosophical themes with Ninon, while Monsieur Villarceaux went out to amuse himself in the neighbourhood, flitting from flower to flower, as ready to converse with the maids as with the mistress.

In the course of a few days, visitors arrived at the château. One of them was the Chevalier Villars Orondate, afterwards ambassador to Spain, a man full of originality and humour. During his stay, he rendered his host a signal service by the exercise of his quaint wit and ingenuity. Monsieur de Vicariville's château was reached by a long, noble avenue, whose perspective would have been incomparable, but for the intrusion of a miserable tumbledown cottage just about midway.

Large sums had been offered when the avenue was made, to its owner, whose name was Jérome, to sell his small holding; but he flatly refused. His father had built the cottage, he had been born in it, and desired to die in it when his time came, continuing meanwhile to follow in it his trade, which was a tailor's; and the eyesore had to be left.

Orondate asked his host what he would give him if he got the cottage removed within a week's time.

"With Jérome's consent, of course?" laughed Vicariville.

"That would not be required."

"I would give you a hundred louis, gladly."

"Money? For shame! It is for glory's sake I would go to work—or at all events for a kiss from Mademoiselle."

Villarceaux demurred at this; but Ninon cheerfully agreed; and going in search of the tailor, Orondate told him he wanted a handsome suit made for Monsieur de Villarceaux, who was going to Court with him. Was he capable of fulfilling the order? Certainly, Jérome was as able to do it as the grandest tailor in Paris.

"Very good. I will give you a pistole a day, if you agree to come and work in the château, never leaving off all day, and entirely under my supervision. Your food will be all found for you; and you will be paid on completion of the task."

The tailor accepted the bargain with delight, and fell to work; while Orondate caused a scrupulously exact plan of the cottage to be made, with precise measurements of every thing in its interior, taking note even of the position of each piece of furniture, and the smallest object in the place. Then he had the entire cottage taken to pieces, the walls knocked down, and the whole load of it transported to a spot a little outside the avenue. There the skilful workmen he had engaged, put it all together again, and all the smallest things back in their places, not forgetting the good man's little soup saucepan, and the enclosing garden hedge.

The avenue, meanwhile, was carefully swept, and cleared of all traces of the removal. Nothing remained to be seen of either the cottage or the garden.

The tailor's work being now completed, he

received his honorarium from Orondate, with a couple of louis in addition. Then going home, well satisfied, towards nightfall he passed down the avenue. It seemed rather long, yet he arrived at the end at last, sooner than he quite expected. Returning, he came and went, came and went, and could find his house nowhere. The poor man spent the night in searching for it. The day broke, and shed light on the avenue, but there was no cottage. Had the foul fiend been at work? Reaching the outskirts of the park, he saw, just beyond the wall, a house resembling his own. Rushing forward, he recognised his own sheltering trees, the garden, the grass-plot, and the honeysuckle hedge. The door faced him, and Jérome inserted the key in its lock.

It fell open smoothly. Going in, he found everything in its proper place—only the table, instead of being bare, bore a smoking hot leg of mutton, flanked by two bottles of wine.

The tailor crossed himself devoutly, convinced that he was bewitched.

The leg of mutton, however, looked appetising, and Jérome was hungry after his long nocturnal perambulations; he approached the joint, and contemplated it with lessening repugnance. Then, fetching his little holy-water brush, he sprinkled the mutton to see if it disappeared; but it smoked on. It certainly had not been cooked in the infernal regions. Jérome took heart therefore, and sat down to dine.

The authors of this curious transformation scene,

concealed to watch what would happen, waited till Jérome had well banqueted; then they entered, and with bursts of laughter, asked him what he thought of the sorcerers of the château?

Monsieur Orondate was paid the price he had asked, Monsieur Vicariville gave Jérome the hundred louis his guest had declined, and the tailor contented himself with pulling a grimace at the trick which had been played him.[1]

It was Mazarin France had to thank for establishing in Paris, musical Italian plays, in other words, Italian operas. From time to time, since the days of Henri III., Italian dramatic singers had visited Paris, finding no regular stage or fair opportunity for their beautiful presentations. Mazarin, however, secured them the rights for these at the Hôtel Bourgogne, and by one of the exercises of his wily ingenuity, also contrived to win away from Charles II. Budeaud, the musical leader of the Court-revels in London, as the conductor of the Paris company.

Early in the winter, whose approach brought Ninon and everybody back to Paris, invitations were issued for the performance of an Italian opera on a magnificent scale, in the Palais Royal, and to Ninon the invitation was sent by the Duc de Condé—who had repented of his harsh estimate of her conduct—and finding his way to her fauteuil in the course of the performance, the two made

[1] This anecdote is attributed by St Simon to another source, and to a much later date; but it truly occurred as here recorded.

their peace by mutual concessions. Meanwhile Condé had diplomatically set several hundred leagues between the lovers, by pairing off Madame de Longueville with her husband to Münster, while he caused the Duc de la Rochefoucauld to be summoned to his duties as governor of Poitou. Independently of the ardent but brief attachment of Rocroi and Nordlingen days, the Duc de Condé entertained sterling admiration and esteem for the qualities of Ninon, and their friendship remained sincere through life.

For three years Ninon came to Paris only at intervals; she remained in the Vexin, with the erratic Marquis de Villarceaux for her companion. Of a furiously jealous nature in regard to the object of his affectionate consideration, he permitted himself a wide range. The lawful wife he owned was, not unnaturally, jealous of Ninon, and made her a constant subject of contention between them. One day she requested the tutor of her little son to examine him before some company she was entertaining, upon his recent classical studies. "*Quem habuit successorum Bellus, rex Assyriorum?*" ("Who succeeded Belus, King of the Assyrians?") inquired the tutor, who was no less a person than the Abbé Scarron.

"*Ninum*," replied the little boy.

The word, so absolutely resembling Ninon, threw Madame de Villarceaux into a furious rage. Scarron vainly endeavoured to explain and justify himself. She would not listen. The answer, she said, was quite enough for her; and Scarron was dis-

missed. It was a cruel accident for him, crippled as he was, so utterly as not to be able to stir from his wheel-chair. Bodily "a wretched log," as he called himself, intellectually more brilliant than ever, and in a human sense, ever the same kindly, generous epicurean philosopher as of old, "always" as he said, "unfortunate." On the top of all his other troubles he had fallen in love. Alas! for the poor prisoner of that wheeled-chair, the helpless wreck of the ex-canon! Ninon found refuge in silence as she stood before him where he had been carried in from his coach. It was long since they had met, and her heart was full of pity. The object of his affection, Scarron went on to tell her, was one Françoise d'Aubigné, a native of Niort. "Ah, d'Aubigné," interrupted Ninon at last. "A Protestant then?" A Calvinist by birth, went on Scarron, and reared in that teaching by an aunt who had adopted her on the death of her parents; but the aunt died, and then a lady, Madame de Neuillan, a friend of the Marquise de Villarceaux, had taken her in hand. It was a misuse of words to call it befriending. It was in this way Scarron had seen her, a charmingly pretty girl of about seventeen.

This Countess de Neuillan was a gorgon of virtue and principle, and, as also a bigot of a Catholic, she had compelled Françoise to become one. In return for all her tender care, Madame de Neuillan imposed the most menial duties on the young girl, who was of angelic disposition as well as beautiful. Her father had been the son of the friend of Henri IV. More or less worthy as

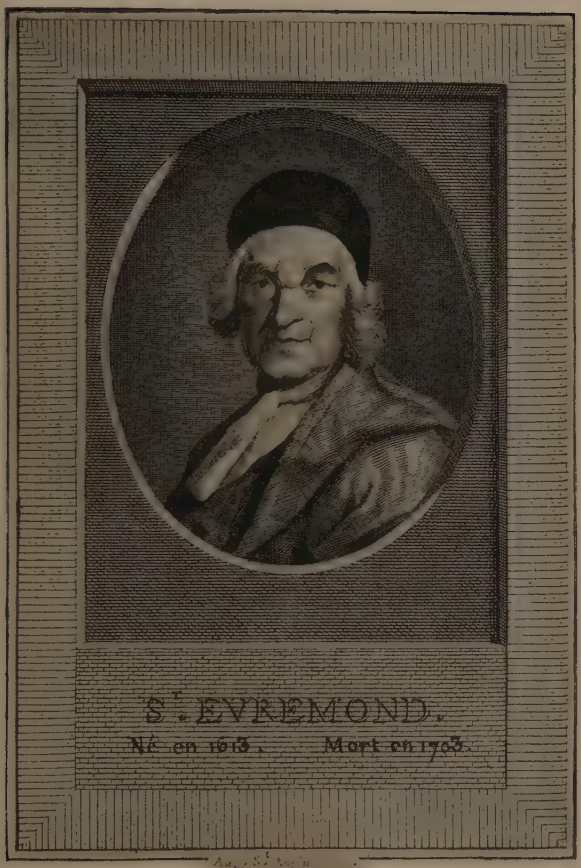
he might be represented—*de mortuis nil nisi bonum*—he had died in prison, guilty of no other crimes, perhaps, than being a Protestant; and so his two children had been left cast in indigence upon the world. The lot of Françoise in the house of Madame de Neuillan was deplorable, and Scarron, as well as some other friends, had advised her to leave her, and get her living by the work of her hands sooner than remain in such dependence; and for twelve months past she had lodged in a little street of a neighbouring faubourg, with her brother, a ne'er-do-well; but still her brother; and her goodness to him was the only fault Scarron had to find in the adorable Françoise. And Ninon's generous heart overflowed with sympathy for the young girl, and she took her to her own home, and they were warm friends, living in the closest ties of affection; and ere long the sweet, modest, gentle girl repaid the kind friend's goodness by winning her lover, Monsieur de Villarceaux, away from her, and Ninon, who was sincerely attached to him, felt the sting acutely. She taxed Françoise with the attempt, which was quite successful, and refused to listen to any denial or excuse, merely saying that they would have the field quite free to themselves, as she was leaving on the following day for Naples. And thither she went, taking the sea-journey from Marseilles. For travelling companion, she had the Chevalier de Méri. This gentleman who had been one of the guests of Monsieur Vicariville had a sister who was married to a Spanish Grandee, to whom was promised the viceroyalty of Naples.

Monsieur de Méri was in every way far more desirable as a companion than the man she had left in the company of Françoise, to whom she also entrusted the *ménage* in the rue des Tournelles, only making the condition that she and Villarceaux should hold their sweet converse exclusively in the "Yellow Chamber," which was the most retired of the rooms. Finding this a little restrictive however, they betook themselves to Brie-Comte Robert, where they spent a fortnight at the house of a cousin of the marquis, who possessed the gift of a still tongue.

Arrived in Naples, Ninon established herself with her faithful servant Perrote, who had attended her *en courrier*, in a small house near the park, and yielded herself up to the charm of the place. "See Naples and die," but it thrilled Ninon with new life. The sunshine, the colour, the curious mingling of indolence and the activity of a seaport, the cloudless azure overhead, the clear blue depths of the bay, the islands washed by the sparkling waters, Vesuvius, calm and treacherous, enchanted her. She lost no time in providing herself with a Neapolitan costume, in which she roved about as the will took her. Nothing was more likely than that when she chartered a barque to sail away and dream her dreams, rocked by the gentle waves of that inland sea, it should have been guided by a young fisherman of some five-and-twenty years old. His handsome features wore a nobility of expression and energy—a picture worthy of a painter's brush, with his sunburnt skin and flashing dark eyes, and dark locks, surmounted by his red woollen cap. This young

fisherman, who told Ninon, when she asked him his name, that it was Aniello—Tommaso Aniello—but the people and his comrades called him "Masaniello." For ever a favourite with them, they were in those early July days of that year of 1647 beginning to idolise him as their champion and leader in the revolt against the oppression and robbery of their Spanish masters.

The viceroyalty of Naples equalled in pomp and extravagance the Court of Madrid, and what wealth was found more than could be used for Naples, was shipped off and transported to Spain, leaving the Neapolitans crushed with poverty, neglected and groaning under the haughty tyranny of the delegated power. Recently the viceroy of the Spanish king, Philip IV., the Duke of Arcos, who wanted more and more funds for carrying on the war with France, had bethought himself of levying a tax on fruit and vegetables. It was but Mazarin's Toisé over again, ever for Jacques Bonhomme and his Italian equivalent to keep things spinning for the honour and glory of a spendthrift nobility, while they robbed the country of their young men, to draft them as soldiers to Spain. In the course of a century, millions of ducats had been paid from one source alone, into the Spanish treasury. These wrongs were stirring the indignation of the Neapolitans to seething heat, and to the people Aniello spoke aloud and with fiery eloquence of the iniquities. To add fuel to the flame, his young wife—or, as other chroniclers tell, his deaf and dumb sister, living at Portici—had been arrested and cast into prison for having in her possession some contraband flour, and



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Aniello had been made to pay to obtain her release. A disturbance in the market-place over the sale of a basket of figs, upon which the unfortunate man who had brought them for sale, was finally required to pay the imposts, ignited the smouldering rage of the oppressed people, and at the head of a troop of thousands of men, women and boys, who wrought destruction on every side as they went, Masaniello forced a way into the viceroy's palace. There with the help and counsel of the Archbishop of Naples, a man popular and respected, the demand for exemption of taxation on all articles of food was accorded. The triumph of Masaniello was complete; but the excitement and the adulation not alone of the people for whose rights he had so successfully striven, but of the viceroy himself, proved too much for him. His mind gave way, he began to act like a maniac; he complained of a sensation like boiling lead in his head. Some of the wretched dregs of the people he had so nobly served, took umbrage at his wild conduct, and the shot from an arquebuse, in the hands of one of the mob thus turned on him, pierced him to the heart. There was nothing left but to regret the heroic man, and he was laid to rest, after his young life's fitful fever, with great pomp and ceremony in the church of S. Maria del Carmine.

No mere demagogue was Masaniello; but a man of noble patriotic aspiration, victim of his own passionate ardour for a great cause. Perhaps as a soldier he would have risen to highest rank and glory; but Masaniello would be no soldier for Spain, and in this resolution he had been streng-

thened, if that were needed, by Salvator Rosa, the painter, who was one of his friends, and by the Duc de Guise, who swore to avenge the death of Masaniello, and kept his word.

Not content with her Neapolitan bodice and skirt, Ninon attired herself in a fisherman's garb, with the object of mingling in the fray of the Neapolitan uprising, and she witnessed the sharp, swift close of Masaniello's little day of triumph. But she left Naples almost immediately after, experiencing various adventures of a sort which she found sufficiently agreeable to detain her still some five or six months from Paris, meeting on her way old friends and new, among them her agreeable acquaintance, the Chevalier Orondate, who was bound for Naples, as legate of Mazarin, who was anxious for acquaintance with every detail of the revolt. There was little Ninon could not tell him of this. She had been a close and intelligent observer. It was more likely that Orondate could get accurate information from one who had witnessed the whole *émeute*, than any gathering up of particulars, now comparative tranquillity had been restored in the city. Therefore the Chevalier did not go on to Naples, but paired off with Ninon for a while into a studious seclusion at Lyons, during which she furnished him with a vivid narrative of the disturbance itself, and of the manner in which the people had been relieved of their cruel burden. It contained the elements of a good object-lesson for Mazarin and for the Court party, now engaged in bitter contention with the Parliament, for the storm of the Fronde had broken.

CHAPTER X

The Fronde and Mazarin—A Brittany Manor—Borrowed Locks—The Flight to St Germains—A Gouty Duke—Across the Channel—The Evil Genius—The Scaffold at Whitehall—Starving in the Louvre — *The Mazarinade* — Poverty — Condé's Indignation—The Cannon of the Bastille—The Young King.

"Vive Mazarin!—Vive la Fronde!" It was to these cries, resounding on all sides, that Ninon returned to her home, and she found it all very disconcerting; if only on the score of the havoc the long contention between the Court and the Parliament was to make in the society of her world. The battle of belles-lettres and of art has poor chance in the field with political turmoil that brings back the dark ages when violence was the only power.

Ninon had but left one discontented country to find another, her own, equally discontented and suffering under oppressive taxation; while across the Channel, in England, civil war was raging to the same watchwords, more fiercely than on the Continent, for all the evil might be less aggressive.

It had been well enough for a while for the crafty Italian prime minister to try and keep the minds of the courtier and the more educated class of the people otherwise employed; but he had remained blind, or had chosen to seem so, to the fact that these were also Frenchmen, and not all, by a great many, mere butterflies and triflers.

Balls and festivities did not bound the range of vision of many a nobly-born gentleman, nor of the statesmen and chiefs in Parliament; and while some sided in the dispute with the queen and Mazarin, there were as many to oppose. "*À-bas Mazarin! À-bas la Fronde!*" and the cries were not to be silenced—though nothing, it was conceived at the outset, would be easier. The Fronde—the term was but a jesting one, arising from the Parliament prohibiting under all sorts of condign punishment the schoolboy game of stone-slinging in the ditches under the walls of Paris, and then it was the witty Barillon improvised his couplet—

> "A Frondy wind this morning arose,
> I hope it won't bite poor Mazarin's nose";

and from St Antoine to St Denis, from Montmartre to St Germain, before night that rhyme was on the tip of every tongue.

The rough discords, the coarse ugly voice of faction soon rendered Paris no place for the Graces. It had become dangerous for women who were not amazons of politics to walk out alone; and Ninon was forced to accept the escort of her cavaliers, among whom were two specially favoured — the young Marquis de Sévigné, son of the incomparable queen of Letter-writing, and of his father, the Maréchal who had worshipped, ten years before, at Ninon's shrine, and the Marquis de Gersay, captain of the Queen's Guards. For refusing to obey the issued order of arrest of the two Parliament counsellors, Blancménil and Broussel, de Gersay had

been deprived of his place, and disgraced. Paris was therefore neither any place for him, and Ninon and he found refuge together in his Brittany home, where they spent ten months together ; at about the end of which time Ninon became the mother of a little son, and the sojourn in Brittany was one of happiness and tranquillity among the patient hard-working peasantry of the district surrounding the old manor-house. Only one cloud darkened Ninon's content, and her dismay was not unnaturally considerable ; for her lovely hair had begun rapidly to come off, so entirely, as to force a wig upon her beautiful head, which the Nantes perruquier bungled so abominably, that the curls and chignon asserted their falseness glaringly enough to extract the sarcastic comments of a lady Ninon believed to be jealous of her, as one disappointed of becoming the wife of de Gersay. "You have very charming hair, madame," said the lady ; "it must have cost you at least six livres." "Just so," said Ninon ; "but you must have paid more for yours, madame ; since even still it is rather thin."

The news reaching them from Paris remained disturbing. The queen and Mazarin had been forced to fly to St Germains with the little Louis, while Condé, returned victorious from Sens, laid siege with his whole army to Paris in the cause of the queen ; but the unpopularity of Mazarin, amounting to bitter hatred, weakened the influence of the Court. A large number of the nobility joined the Fronde party, of whom de Retz was one of the foremost, while the once delicate and retiring

Duchesse de Longueville was the inspiration and ardent leader of the Frondeurs. Where she was, de la Rochefoucauld could but follow, though his political views had in themselves no great depth. His mistress's will was his; to gain her favour, he said, to please her beautiful eyes, he "made war upon kings: had need been, he would have made it on the gods."

Amidst all the rancour and uproar was mixed a vast amount of frivolity and of mockery of serious warfare. The generals led soldiers, scented and lace and ribbon-bedecked, to parade; and the women looked on, and applauded or jeered at them, as the fancy took them.

"Brave de Bouillon's got the gout,
Oh, he is lion-brave no doubt,
But when there's a troop to put to rout,
And Condé's men he has to flout,
Then brave de Bouillon's got the gout."

This favourite piece of Frondeur doggerel was for ever assailing the ears of Monseigneur le Duc de Bouillon, when Condé changed sides, influenced strongly by his sister, as well as by his own convictions. The anger of the queen at his secession was terrible. She spared no one who had been ever implicated in the Fronde side of the quarrel, and de Gersay was one of the first to be avenged upon. But warning came in time, and the contingent of musketeers despatched to arrest him, arrived too late at the old Brittany manor-house. Ninon and de Gersay had already fled to St Mâlo, where they set sail for England, of whose shores

they were already well in sight, when the soldiers reached the château.

The imbroglio in Paris had now touched seething-point. The queen and Mazarin decided to blockade the city, and to obtain submission by reducing the inhabitants to starvation; but the firmness of President Molé and of the advocate Talon, strong in their principles of defence of the rights of all the community in the face of royal despotism, saved the situation. Mazarin sent to the Parliament a *lettre-de-cachet* for the imprisonment of the princes and leaders of the Fronde: the Parliament retorted by denouncing Mazarin as an enemy of the king and the State, and a disturber of the public peace, and ordered him to quit the country within a week's time. For the unfortunate thousands, weary of the conflict, asking only for peace and quietness, it was misery and confusion confounded, and they were thankful when a truce was patched up. But it was a mockery, for while the Parliament retained its right to assemble, the queen retained her prime minister, detested by most, mistrusted even by more.[1]

And meanwhile the dark clouds of anarchy and bitter contention brooding over France had blackened and burst over England into the storm of the tragedy of the 30th of January, which saw

[1] "Est animal rubrum, callidum, rapax, et vorax omnium benificiorum. Mazarin is a misfortune to the queen, her evil genius, consequently ours. I hate him as I do the devil, and hold him for what he is, *morus nebule*, a creature destitute of honour, a mime in a red hat, and a long-robed charlatan."

GUY PATIN.

the death of King Charles I. by the headsman's axe at Whitehall.

Who that headsman was, and what of the real truth and trustworthy detail of the king's execution, who shall say? Romance, in which reality may lie concealed, clings to that last scene, in which only it is certain that Charles Stuart bore himself for the king he was, and that while thousands of loyal subjects wept that day for the victim of Cromwell's ambition, the regret in France was deep and far-reaching.

Ninon was in London, a refugee, at the time, and it is possible as one authority avers, that she was present with de Gersay, and obtained from His Majesty a lock of his hair as he stood upon the scaffold, and that at a later time she took this to the queen, Henrietta Maria. One has to bear in mind that the "Musketeer" heroes immortalised by Dumas, also stood beneath the scaffold on that sad occasion. And why not? Royalist sympathy in France with our Cromwell-ridden country was strong. That Anne of Austria felt little of it for her unhappy sister-in-law, is self-evident, since Henrietta, lodged in the Louvre with her children, found shelter indeed, but cold comfort enough otherwise, being found, at last, fireless and almost foodless; and it was only when their destitute condition was represented to Mazarin, that he instantly sent her a good sum of money and other required assistance.

Buckingham's adored divinity, possibly, had all her accredited beauty, her portraits notwithstanding,

but it is difficult to trace much milk of human kindness or warmth of heart in "Dame Anne" throughout her career. Her Spanish pride and dignity could have been scantily tempered with the high, generous characteristics of her compatriots. Had the troubles environing her engrossed her, the case might have seemed in a measure excusable; but in the face of the storm of the Frondy wind, or perhaps because of it, the balls and routs and love-intriguing, and the rest, were carried on in full rush: for that there was ever ample leisure.

About this time Scarron wrote his *Mazarinade*, and continued to be in love with his Françoise. She was desperately poor, and gained scanty subsistence by needlework, supplemented by what Scarron earned from the proceeds of his writing, which she carried in MS. for him to and fro the printers. *The Mazarinade* was an immense success; but the author gained financially less than nothing from its publication; as it so offended the queen, that the pension she had granted him was withdrawn, and the marriage with Françoise his heart was set upon had to be delayed. She had, however, in the meantime, consented to take up her abode with him, and they were happy.

After some months' sulking away in various places, the Court returned to Paris, having again patched up a sort of reconciliation, and on that occasion Condé found himself in the same coach with Mazarin. The drive could scarcely have been an enjoyable one, and the hollow *entente cordiale* only gave the Frondeurs offence. It lasted a very little

time, for soon after, when Mazarin was attempting to arrange a marriage of one of his nieces with a close connexion of de Condé's, the proud prince said furiously that at the best "they were only fit to be the wives of Mazarin's valets. Go and tell him so," added Condé; "and if he is angry, let his captain of the guards bring him by his beard to the Hôtel de Condé."

The cardinal swallowed the insult and continued to offer high favours to Condé, who refused them all, and in a little time the fury of the dispute broke out again more fiercely than ever. Condé, strong in the service he had rendered his country, grew insupportably arrogant, and, not content with insulting Mazarin, was constantly offending the queen. This ended in the arrest of himself, his brother, the Prince de Conti, and the Duc de Longueville, and they were imprisoned at Havre. Madame de Longueville thereupon hastened to Normandy, where she tried to create an uprising for her party, but failing in this she allied herself with Turenne, then fighting for Spain. A new party was now formed, headed by the princes, and called the "Little Fronde"—and big and little joined force against Mazarin, and the cardinal, bending at last to the storm, went to Havre and set Condé and the other princes free. But this did not satisfy the demands of the Fronde, and he finally quitted France and took up his abode in Cologne, still contriving to pull the strings of the French Court party.

The following year he was back again, taking advantage of the quarrel within quarrel of the

leaders of both parties. Memorable among these fearful frays was that encounter in the Faubourg St Antoine, when Mademoiselle de Montpensier, "La Grande Mademoiselle," the brave daughter of the pusillanimous Gaston of Orléans, mounted to the towers of the Bastille, and ordered the troops of the king to fire upon the troops of Condé, now a leader of the Fronde. It was a splendid victory as far as it went; but it only strengthened the hatred against the cardinal. Anarchy and terror were at their height, and to be accused of Mazarinism was to come in fear of death. Yet, for the third time, and the triumphant last, Mazarin returned, to be welcomed by the fickle people, to remain at the head of the government till he died, after having the satisfaction of seeing his five nieces all brilliantly married, and supremely content with the result of his training of the young king, which was to prove so disastrous at a later time. It was a training of utter neglect of everything but the knowledge of his own importance, and that did not need impressing upon the proud, dominating nature of Louis XIV. Said Mazarin one day—"He has stuff in him to make four kings."

CHAPTER XI

Invalids in the rue des Tournelles—On the Battlements—"La Grande Mademoiselle"—Casting Lots—The Sacrifice—The Bag of Gold—"Get Thee to a Convent"—The Battle of the Sonnets—A Curl-paper—The Triumph and Defeat of Bacchus—A Secret Door—Cross Questions and Crooked Answers—The Youthful Autocrat.

SEVERAL of the severely wounded, under the firing of the Bastille cannon, were carried by Ninon's desire into her house in the rue des Tournelles. Among these were the Comte de Fiesque and the Abbé d'Effiat. Both of these gentlemen were so cruelly weakened by loss of blood, that it was long before either of them was able to be removed. Fiesque had the misfortune to be married to an exceedingly disagreeable woman, cross and ill-tempered with everybody, herself included. There was no longer any affection between her and her husband, and as he made no pretence of being true to her, it was little less than a matter of course that he should find himself fascinated by the charms of his kind nurse and hostess, while the abbé was no less enthralled; and Ninon, weary of the Fronde—as in fact who was not?—resumed the old society ways of the rue des Tournelles.

It was Gondi, the bishop's coadjutor, who laid to his singular half-devout, half-profligate soul the flattering unction that he was the author of the restored peace; and on the strength of it, he

obtained the red hat he so ardently coveted, and became the Cardinal de Retz, so renowned for his romantic and adventurous career; but he did not escape the vengeance of his mortal foe Mazarin, who arrested him and confined him in the castle of Vincennes. Thence de Retz obtained removal to the Château of Nantes, a stronghold safely walled and moated round about, which appertained to his family. Some chroniclers credit it with being the scene of the crimes of the terrible Bluebeard, Gilles de Retz, Marquis de Laval. It is almost as stern and forbidding-looking as "Black Angers," and with as long a record of interest. Its massive walls were first built into the bed of the deep-flowing Loire in the fourteenth century, and its frowning towers vividly conjure to the mind's eye the picture of Sister Anne watching from their summits for "anybody coming."

Its bastions and walls, and slate and granite round-towers bear the cross of Lorraine, carved on them during the wars of the League. Anne of Brittany, born within its walls, is said to have been married for the second time in its chapel—now a powder magazine—and here, too, Henri IV. signed the Edict of Nantes, which gave to the Huguenots their religious freedom, to be so shamefully withdrawn at the instigation of the amiable Françoise d'Aubigné.

One night, while de Retz was languishing in an upper chamber of the Mercœur tower of this prison of his, a boat lay moored beneath in the shadow, and de Retz contrived that the guard and

sentry of the castle should all be furnished with ample means for a carouse. It was tempting, and not one declined the generosity of his good-natured Eminence. The revellers grew sleepy and dazed; too entirely so to do more than gaze lack-lustrely up at their prisoner's red cloak and hat, blowing about in the evening breeze upon the upper walls of the battlements which he was permitted to pace for exercise. De Retz, meanwhile, who had slipped out of his vesture, and hung it there, was dropping rapidly down by a rope moored fast to the stanchions of his loophole casement in the Tour de Mercœur, into the boat which was then sped away to the shore by the oars of one of his trusty waiting friends, of whom he had scores; and in this way gained the spot upon the banks where a horse was waiting ready saddled. Springing up, de Retz bounded away on his steed, which in very short time flung him, and his shoulder was dislocated; but, the pain notwithstanding, he mounted again, and then reaching the shelter of the Château de Beaupréau, he made his way through Spain to Rome and perfect safety, until by resigning his archbishopric, which through the death of his uncle had become his, he was reconciled to the governing powers of France and returned to Paris.

Of the two most prominent leaders in the long civil contention, Condé retired to Spain, and Mademoiselle de Montpensier wandered about from château to château in Normandy, forbidden to come to Paris for several years. All idea of her marriage with Louis XIV. was extinguished on the

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day she fired upon the royal troops. "Very good!" exclaimed Mazarin then, "she has killed her husband."

Something less than a year later a little daughter was born to Ninon. There was so much doubt concerning its paternity, that the Comte de Fiesque and the Abbé d'Effiat had no choice but to make a throw of the dice for the rightful claim on it, and de Fiesque being the winner, subsequently had the child educated and reared at his own cost, insisting on this in despite of Ninon wishing to keep it under her own care. But towards herself the attachment of the count rapidly cooled. To bring him back to her feet, she conceived the ruse of cutting off her hair, the real locks, for these having grown again. There was, however, something in this of the virtue of necessity; as it was again threatening to become scanty—and sending them by a servant to the count, it exercised its intended effect; as he regarded it as a touching sacrifice, and Fiesque was again at her feet, penitent, and tender as ever. But Ninon, thus triumphing, dismissed him from the old position, and relegated him to the ranks only of friendship. Once more the hair of Ninon began to grow luxuriantly, and she devised a fashion of arranging it that was so charming, as to find the sincere flattery of imitation—"*Se coiffer à la Ninon*" —became the rage.

The wife of de Fiesque wrote Ninon a terrible letter of reproach for her intrigue with the count. It would seem to have been prompted simply by revenge, as the lady made no pretence of affection

for her husband; but the fear of entailing injury to the child, strongly influenced Ninon to desire to have it in her own care. The count, however, had left the country for Spain, and she had difficulty in discovering with whom the poor babe had been placed. She was, moreover, moving at that time in one of her whirling rounds of gaiety, and of a thoughtless folly, that at a later day brought its sincere regrets; and she abandoned the search, and followed on by the old ways, bestowing her smiles chiefly on the Comte de Miossens, who had been distinguishing himself greatly under Maurice of Orange.

An old friend, Monsieur de Gourville—who, as a warm partisan of the Duc de Condé and the Duchesse de Longueville, had remained away from Paris for a long time—returned one day somewhat unexpectedly, and Ninon, naturally looking for a visit from him, waited, but in vain. At last she wrote him a little note to ascertain why he so long delayed his coming, and so much the more since he had entrusted to her keeping a large sum of money in gold in a bag, having at the same time placed as much more with the Grand Penitentiary. This individual had now, he told de Gourville, given it all to the poor; as he supposed that had been as de Gourville had intended, but it had not been the intention. The money had been deposited in trust, said de Gourville, who added he should have liked to strangle the Grand Penitentiary.

"And did you have the fancy," said Ninon, "that I had distributed the sixty thousand livres also in good works?"

"No, but in gowns and fal-lals. At least, you would own to the truth of it," said de Gourville, "and I like that better."

But Ninon owned to no such thing. She bade de Gourville understand her rightly. Light, perhaps frivolous, she might be, but she prided herself on being honest; and going to fetch the bag of gold, she placed it before him with the fastenings intact.

When de Gourville mentioned this circumstance among his friends, it was to accord Ninon signal praise; but to that Ninon utterly disclaimed right. There was, she said, no merit in doing one's duty. Her mode of life was the result of the philosophical system she had adopted. To be honest, what should one be else?

And for her mode of life, it had none of the glaring indifference to decent outward conduct, which some of the dames of society indulged in. Many ladies of blameless living came to her *réunions*. Among them was the Comtesse de Choisy, lady of honour to the queen, and she promised to befriend Ninon in the matter of the threat Anne ever held over her of sending her to a convent. The thought of cloistral seclusion was a terror to Ninon; unless now and again, theoretically it might be pleasant. Ninon observed certain restraints in her ways of life; and more than once she excluded from her *réunions* fashionable high-born women who had scandalised society by their loose conduct. Moreover, Madame de Longueville was one now of her intimate friends, and she often brought with her to

Ninon's house her young brother, who had distinguished himself bravely in the Fronde, and she would not countenance corruption of the youthful hero by including women of notorious evil-living among her guests.

Madame de Longueville, lacking the power to carry on any more political intrigue, took up literature, and set the Hôtel Rambouillet in a ferment, by her championing of Voiture's sonnet on *Uranie* against Benserade, who had composed one on *Job*. The Uranists and the Joblins contended fiercely over the merits of the two productions. The news of the victory of Rocroi did not create greater excitement than the clamour of rivalry made over the two poets.

Madame de Longueville failed to win back the favour of the queen after the part she had taken in the Fronde. She grew disgusted with the world, and retired into the convent of the Visitation at Moulins, of which her aunt, the widow of the Duc de Montmorency, was the superior. Some time later, her husband persuaded her to return to the world; but it was not to Paris, but to Rome she went to live, and so the ties of friendship between her and Ninon fell away.

The whim once seized Ninon to pretend to one of her admirers that she wished to marry. The young man ardently expressed his willingness for this; but Ninon insisted on having a settlement from him, and no small one, being in fact nearly his whole fortune. He signed it away to her. Long before the arrival of the proposed wedding-

day, however, the *fiancé's* ardour had cooled; and his misery at the loss of his money would have melted a stone to compassion. Having carried on her amusement long enough, Ninon one morning told him, as she sat at her toilet-table, to unroll the curl-paper on her left temple. He did so, and Ninon bade him keep it, which he joyfully did; for it was his little bill of eighty thousand or so of livres. Then she released him from his allegiance, warning him to be more careful in future of rash promises; since some women were designing and absolutely unscrupulous.

Monsieur de Navailles, the husband of the lady who had the care of the queen's young ladies of honour, was another admirer of Ninon's. His devotion was out-rivalled, however, by that he paid to Bacchus. Piqued at his neglect of her, she contrived to punish him on one of the several occasions when the vine-leaves were in his hair, by appearing to him, after his prolonged sleep, in his own *pourpoint*, and putting his hat on her head, she entered the room where he lay snoring. Flourishing a sword, and swearing like a trooper, she threatened to run him through; and then, having succeeded in really alarming him, she laughingly revealed her identity.

Madame de Navailles was a rigid disciplinarian with her charges — not without cause, for Louis XIV., arriving at years of discretion, had evinced great interest in the mode of life led by them in their private apartments; but Madame de Navailles was adamant. De Navailles, therefore, who was

ambitious of advancement at Court, devised the notion of becoming once more greatly enamoured of his wife; and thus gaining access to the general salon of the ladies, he contrived, without madame's knowledge, to get a panel knocked out in the wall skirting a small stairway, by which nothing was easier than for his youthful Majesty to come and go at pleasure. This means of communication being however, very soon discovered, the aperture was blocked up; so greatly to the annoyance of the king, that he dismissed Madame de Navailles from her post; though he had the gratitude to present her husband with the marshal's bâton.

It was at this time, for a good while past, that Ninon lived under the terror of the queen's threat of sending her into a convent, the more likely to be carried out now on account of the part she had taken in the events of the Fronde. Her numerous friends and partisans were also anxious on this score, and the matter became one of so much interest and discussion, that one day a champion presented himself at her door, seeking an interview. He represented himself as an ex-captain of the Guards of Christina, Queen of Sweden, who, he said, entertained a considerable appreciation of such fine, tall, robust giants as he was. Ninon, however, who accepted his services and his sword at the wage of a pistole a day, soon found him rather an incubus, and was glad to hand him over to the service of Monsieur de Navailles.

The consecration of the young king was now about to take place at Rheims. Each of the queen's

ladies of honour was authorised to choose a companion from among her friends for the ceremony, and Madame de Choisy invited Ninon for this purpose, having the generous intention of trying to restore her to the regent's favour. It was entirely successful. Not only was all fear of the terrible injunction being carried out removed, but Ninon, on the return to Paris, was invited to join the friendly *réunions* at the Palais Royal. Sometimes these took place in the queen's small salon, sometimes in the apartments of Mazarin. The invited ones vastly enjoyed themselves, with the exciting pastimes of questions and answers, and broken sentences. Sometimes the violins were sent for, and they danced the *Quénippe* or the *Diablesse*, and still oftener there were games of romps.

The cardinal's four nieces were nearly always present at these gatherings. They were all charming and beautiful, Olympe, Hortense and Laure Mancini, though not absolutely and perfectly sweet-tempered. It was reserved to Marie, less regularly featured than her sisters, but far more fascinating and amiable, to bear the palm, and to win the attentions of the king. These were carried so far, that it was thought by many—Mazarin indeed hoped, and his hopes were apt to find fulfilment—that she would be queen. She assumed great authority over Louis, to the extent of not allowing him to cast stray glances of admiration on the ladies of the Court or at her sisters. Louis, however, was apt to rebel on this head. To this influence, Marie, then a girl of fourteen only, the well-known fact is ascribed of Louis, then but a

youth of sixteen, hurrying from the chase, back to Paris, and booted and spurred, his whip in his hand, entering the grand council chamber of the Parliament, where some new financial edicts were being considered after the holding of a Bed of Justice, and revised with a view to seeking some modification of them. In haughty tones, and with a majestic air, Louis bade the councillors disperse and leave the edicts as they had been drawn up. "Monsieur le President," he said, "the evils attending these meetings of Parliament are but too well known. Henceforward I forbid them, as I also forbid these edicts just registered, to be tampered with."

These words echoed through all Europe. They provoked murmurs long and deep of the Parliament, and it was only with the greatest difficulty that the prudence of Turenne was able to keep under the widespread dissatisfaction.

The policy of Mazarin's "education" of the young king was already bearing the fruit of the future misery of the country which his Eminence's alien authority so disastrously ruled.

The intimacy of Ninon and Marie Mancini grew into friendship, and Marie's confidences made it clear to Ninon that it was her uncle's intention, if not her own avowed one, that she should be the wife of Louis XIV. But the constancy of the great young monarch was ever a fragile thing.

CHAPTER XII

The Whirligig of Time, and an Old Friend—Going to the Fair—A Terrible Experience—The Young Abbé—"The Brigands of La Trappe"—The New Ordering—An Enduring Memory—The King over the Water—Unfulfilled Aspirations—"Not Good-looking."

Tempora mutantur. Ninon, in the course of the years which were now bringing her to middle life, had seen many changes; but when her friend St Evrémond came back about this time from the wars, after seven or eight years' absence, he told her that she had not changed with them. Beautiful and youthful-looking as ever he assured her she was, and to prove his words, he took a little mirror in one hand, and in the other the portrait Rubens had painted of her years before, and bade her make the comparison herself.

There is little doubt, at all events, that Time's finger had scarcely dulled the delicacy of her complexion, or the brightness of her eyes.

Were thanks due to the Man in Black for this? It was a question she put to St Evrémond very seriously, but the cheery Epicurean had only a smile and a witticism for answer. The devil, he assured her, did not exist, and he proposed to escort her to the fair of St Germain that fine February afternoon. This was scarcely the best way to make good his assertion; for if his Satanic Majesty was to be found in Paris, it was certainly

in that quarter; for was not the rue d'Enfer, whence the Capucins had ejected him from his house, hard by? This, however, had by no means hindered the brethren of St Germain des Prés countenancing the proceedings, which had come to be near to an orgy, of the annual market, or fair of St Germain des Prés—by the letting their ground for it to be held upon. From the king, to the most villainous of the populace, everybody went to the fair. The booths were within hail of the ground known as the *Pré aux Clercs*, the haunt of the *basochiens*, the lawyers' clerks of the Palais de Justice, away upon the Ile de la Cité, between St Sulpice and St Germain—the church of the three steeples. The roof of the modern flower-market now covers this ground. Everything conceivable could be purchased at the stalls, from the richest silks and velvets to a pancake or a glass eye, or a wooden leg or a wax arm, or essences and waters for turning old people young again; every game of chance, thimblerig, lottery, cards, held out its temptation; every kind of entertainment, dancing, tumbling, jugglery, music of fiddle and fife, and drum and tabor—a deafening *tintamarre;* all kinds of beverages—wine, cider, tea, coffee—"to drive away melancholy;" syrups were concocted for the dust-dried throats of the surging crowd of fine ladies, students, lackeys, soldiers, dainty-shod, short-cloaked, blond-bewigged abbés, pages, beggars, gipsies. Respectable bourgeois families rubbed shoulders with flaunting women, and the wretched crew of mendicant impostors from the old *cours de miracles*. Often it was the

scene of fracas and fisticuffs and damaged countenances. On one occasion, a page of the Duc de Bouillon cut off the ears of a clerk of the *basoche* and put them in his pocket. The students of the quarter fell to murderous assault upon the fellow, while the pages retaliated, and many a dead body of page and student was found afterwards in the ditches of the Abbaye. At once an earthly paradise and a pandemonium was the time-honoured annual market of St Germain des Prés, and in the midst of the madding riot and confusion a great deal of serious business was transacted among the merchants and foreign traders who came from afar to exhibit their wares, as for centuries had been the custom, ever since mediæval day, when church porches and convent gates were nearly the only rendezvous for buying and selling.

Not absolutely accepting St Evrémond's theory, Ninon and her cavalier left the fair to walk homewards, little thinking that they were to be confronted by the blood-chilling tale the pale lips of Madame de Chevreuse poured hurriedly out to them from the window of her carriage, which she called to a halt as they passed across the Pont Neuf—a tale upon whose precise details the chronicles of the time slightly differ, even to casting doubt upon it as a fact, though the circumstances are no more than consonant with probability. The beautiful but profligate Madame de Montbazon, it will be remembered, had been sent by the queen, on account of her glaring attempts at mischief-making, to reflect upon her misdeeds at Tours. It was

held that she would not find the punishment so tedious and unpleasant as it might have been if M. l'Abbé de Rancé had not been in the neighbourhood. He was her lover, and a most ardent one, constantly by her side, but not to persuade her to penitence; on the contrary, de Rancé was wild and profligate of life as the woman he adored. He was brilliantly clever. At school he outrivalled his classfellow Bossuet, and when but thirteen, he published an essay on the dignity of the soul; and beneath his dissolute ways the gold of a conscience, of which so many of the Courtly circle in which he moved seemed absolutely devoid, often shone through. Armand Jean de Rancé was one of an old and distinguished family, and he was only ten years old when the Abbey of la Trappe in Normandy was bestowed on him.

The monastery of la Grand Trappe du Perche, said to have been so named from its hidden position among the dense forests of the stormy Norman headland, is of very ancient foundation. It was established in the twelfth century by Robion, Comte du Perche. The brethren followed the Cistercian rule, and for several centuries it was in high repute for the sanctity of its community, and for its wealth, which was put to its legitimate charitable uses. In course of time, like so many other abbeys, it was given *in commendam*, and its pious repute fell away to such an extent that the seven monks—all that remained in the monastery—were called by the surrounding peasantry "the brigands of la Trappe." They were notorious for their evil living, spending the time in drinking and hunting; and shunned

alike by men, women and children, the Trappist monks were the terror of the district.

It was at this time that the child, Armand de Rancé, was made Abbé, and affairs at la Trappe continued to fall from bad to worse. As de Rancé grew up, among many benefices conferred on him, he was appointed Almoner to the Duke of Orléans, and spent most of his time in a whirl of dissipation in the Courtly circles in Paris. His splendid entertainments, his magnificent house, the trappings of his horses, especially those of the chase, were the talk of Paris, and his daring intrigues startled even the licence indulged in by the society he moved in. In this circle de Rancé specially singled out the stepmother of the Duchesse de Chevreuse, Madame de Montbazon, a woman as notorious for her profligacy and unscrupulous character as she was physically beautiful.

After a time spent in banishment at Touraine, she had been permitted to return to her Paris home, and de Rancé, who had been absent for a short time, returning to Paris, hastened to call upon her. Arrived at the house, he found it deserted, and passing in by an open door, he hurried along the silent passages, calling for the servants and upon her name, but there was no response. At last he reached the door of her apartments, and rushing across the anteroom, he flung aside the *portières* of her bedchamber. An open, trestle-supported coffin, across which a sheet lay carelessly flung, met his eyes, and turning from it to the table close by, the decapitated head of Madame de Montbazon con-

fronted him. Momentarily he failed to recognise the features of the ghastly object; for the face was blurred with the ravages of smallpox. The fell disease had attacked Madame de Montbazon, and she had died of it. The body and head were being prepared for embalming, and for this end—or as some versions of the tale tell, because the coffin had not been made long enough—the head had been cut off, and placed upon the table.

The silent horror of this ghastly experience carried an eloquence beyond all power of words to the heart of de Rancé. Swayed by a revulsion of feeling, naturally sensitive and imaginative, he looked back upon his past life with loathing. The hollowness of worldly pleasures, and uncertainties of a worldly existence were yet still more deeply impressed upon his mind, by a serious accident he suffered in the hunting-field, and by the death of his patron, the Duc d'Orléans. All seemed vanity.

De Rancé was at this time thirty-four years old. With the exception of the ancient monastery of la Trappe, lost amid the wild forests verging on the perilous rock-bound shores of extreme North-Western Normandy, he divested himself of his property and possessions, and went to take up his residence in la Trappe, endeavouring to establish the old discipline in it. But the seven spirits he found there were unruly, and had no mind for being disturbed. So entirely were they opposed to the abbé's reforms, that his life was in danger from them, for they threatened to throw him into the fish-ponds; and Brigadier Loureur,

stationed at Mortagne, the nearest town of importance, begged de Rancé to accept a guard of his soldiery; but de Rancé decided that since the brigands of la Trappe had clearly less than no vocation for the vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience, they were best entirely got rid of—and he pensioned them off and sent them away, not in wrath, but in peace. Their place was filled by Cistercian brethren of the strict observance.

The position of an abbé, or for that matter, an abbess in the ranks of the Church, had long become an anomalous one. The relaxation of the old rigid conventual ruling had wrought great changes. It was not unusual to find some lady of a noble family appointed to the nominal charge of a monastery, and some equally nobly-born gentleman set over a community of nuns; and in either case, as likely as not, they had no knowledge, or next to none, of the every-day mode of life or working of such community. At the fair of St Germain the abbés always swarmed thick as flies, in their short black habits and delicate little linen bands, as where did they not congregate in the society of the time? The salons of the Hôtel de Rambouillet and other brilliant assemblies were dotted all over with them. They were the makers of *petits vers* and *bouts rimés*, and, if nothing more, pretty well indispensable to the following of a fine lady as *cavaliere serventis*. They were wont to make themselves generally amusing and agreeable, everything, in short, but useful to the spiritual needs of the Church in whose ranks they were supposed

to serve. They wore their vows too lightly for the Abbé de Rancé to dream of exercising real authority in virtue of the title alone; and he qualified himself for the dignity he intended to assume of Superior of the monastery of la Trappe in Normandy—by entering as a novice in the Cistercian Abbey of Persigny. This ended, he took the vows, in company with a servant who was deeply attached to him, and was confirmed abbot.

The order of strict Cistercian observance is rigid in the extreme—almost utter silence, hard labour, total abstinence from wine, eggs, fish, and any seasoning of the simple fare of bread and vegetables. The earnestness and eloquence of de Rancé stirred the men desirous of joining the brotherhood to such a deep enthusiasm, that many of them wanted to take the full vows at once; but the Abbé of la Trappe refused them this, lest they should not have truly counted the cost of their sacrifice. And not only in this case, but in others the famous reformer of the ancient monastery showed a singular judgment and reasonableness in the ordering of his community. And "his works do follow him"; for still as of old, hidden amid those dark forests, though not far from the haunts of men, stands the Priory of Notre Dame de Grâce de la Trappe, its brethren, spending their time not given to devotion, in almsgiving and healing and acts of charity of every kind.

In England, meanwhile, great if not unanticipated changes had befallen. Oliver Cromwell was dead. He had passed away in comparative peace in his bed. Had his days numbered even a few more,

they might have terminated in assassination, for deep-laid schemes for this were hatching. The dreary Commonwealth was growing daily more displeasing, and the English people were longing for the king to have his own again. It was a day of joy indeed to Queen Henrietta Maria which saw the progress of King Charles II. to London. She had some desire that he should wed la Grande Mademoiselle, Gaston d'Orléans' daughter; but Mademoiselle nursed a hope of becoming the wife of her cousin, Louis XIV., a hope that was not to be realised. Possibly, as Mazarin had said, the Bastille cannonading had killed that husband; but after her long wanderings she was again at Court, and in fair favour.

Louis XIV., without being strictly handsome, had agreeable features and a fine presence, which his pride and self-consciousness knew very well how to make the most of. He had grown from the mere youth into a dignified, courtly young manhood, and the want of knowledge and defective bringing up were fairly well concealed by "the divinity which doth hedge a king." It certainly always enfolded Louis XIV. "Ah, my dear cousin," cried Queen Christina of Sweden, when she first saw him, "some one told me you were not good-looking! *Sacre-bleu!*" she added, bestowing a sounding kiss on both of Louis's cheeks, "if I had the man who told that lie here, I would cut off his ears before you!" and she still stood gazing admiringly at the king. So there could be no further doubt about his attractive appearance; for Queen Christina was accounted an unerring judge in such matters.

CHAPTER XIII

Christina's Modes and Robes—Encumbering Favour—A Comedy at the Petit-Bourbon—The Liberty of the Queen and the Liberty of the Subject—Tears and Absolutions—The Tragedy in the Galérie des Cerfs—Disillusions.

CHRISTINA, ex-Queen of Sweden, was not more nice in style of dress than she was in the choice of a word to add strength to her affirmations, and "*sacré-bleu*" was a mild sponsor for the swear-word she really selected on the occasion. The startling force of it, combined with the extraordinary costume she wore, excited an irrepressible burst of laughter from the queen and from Mazarin, and all present followed suit—all but the king, who looked dis concerted and rebukeful.

Christina wore a wig, standing up high over her forehead, with tufts of curls sticking out, all rough and tousled, on each side of her face, which was, however, far from really ill-looking. She had on a coat, which was a cross between a man's *pourpoint* and a woman's cape, put on so carelessly that it left one shoulder half-exposed. Her skirt was not cut *à la mode* into a long train; it was merely a round petticoat, so short as to afford ample display of leg. A man's shirt and a man's boots completed this costume, in which the great King of Sweden's daughter presented herself to the Majesties of France.

She met the risible gaze of the Court with dis-

pleasure, and inquired what they were all staring at. "Am I humpbacked?" she demanded, "or aren't my legs well-shaped?" The king, with courtly good-nature, threw oil on the troubled waters, and Christina was pacified, observing that Louis spoke like the king and gentleman he was. "And as for you others," she added to the rest, "mind yourselves."

Ninon, who was indisposed, was not present at this scene; but recovering some days later, she went to the Louvre, where, thanks to her friend Madame de Choisy, she came and went constantly; and as she passed along a gallery leading to that lady's apartments she met Madame de Choisy and Christina, who was attired in very much the same manner as already described, but slightly less *outré*.

The queen was fascinated at first sight with Ninon. She placed her two hands on her shoulders and gazed long and fixedly into her face. "Now I understand, my dear," she said at last, "all the follies the men commit, and will commit for you. Embrace me," and she bestowed two such sounding kisses on Ninon's cheeks, as she had bestowed on the king's. Then taking her by the arm, she led her to her own assigned apartments, at the door of which stood two bearded men, one of them Count Monaldeschi, her Grand Master of the Horse, the other the successor of the redoubtable Desmousseaux, the Chevalier Sentinelli, captain of her guard.

Some time before her visit to Paris, Christina had abdicated, declaring that the formalities and

restrictions of the existence of a crowned queen were unendurable, the cares of a kingdom rendered life a slavery, and she desired perfect liberty. The liberty she sought for herself, however, she in no wise extended to others; for while she renounced her claims to her inherited kingdom, she reserved to herself absolute and supreme authority, with the right of life and death over all who should enter her service or be of her suite. Then, a Protestant born, she joined the Catholic communion. It was probably a mere caprice; for she did not spare her coarse witticisms on the newly-adopted faith, and very soon she contrived so seriously to offend the College of Cardinals that she was forced to leave Rome, which she had entered on horseback, dressed almost like a man. After a while she had come to France, and probably somewhat impressed with the elegancies of the Court, she made some modification of the hideous attire she had first appeared in. When Ninon first met her in the Louvre gallery, Her Majesty wore a grey petticoat skirt of decent length, trimmed with gold and silver lace, a scarlet camlet coat, her wig was of the unvarying pale yellow hue, and she carried a handkerchief of costly lace, and a broad-brimmed hat, plumed with black ostrich feathers. With her white skin, her aquiline nose and fine teeth, she would have made a very presentable boy.

She was very voluble, and her immeasurable admiration of Ninon to her face, was almost disconcerting, even to one so very well accustomed to compliments. At last, the subject being exhausted,

the ex-queen fell to asking all sorts of questions about the king, the queen, the cardinal, the new palace at Versailles, the Italian Opera. Then she had much to say about her own country and her abdication; about Descartes, who had died at her Court a victim to the climate; about Count Monaldeschi, with whom, she confided to Ninon, she was on terms of very close intimacy, and about a hundred other things.

During Christina's stay in Paris, Ninon had the delight of seeing again that most dear friend and protégé of hers, Molière, after his long absence in the provinces. Christina was with Ninon when he arrived, and as he and his company were to play that same night the *Cocu Imaginaire*, at the Petit-Bourbon, it was arranged that the two ladies should be present.

Christina had the appetite of an ogress, and before they started for the theatre, she did ample justice to the handsome repast Perrote served up. Then Her ex-Majesty summoned her captain of the Guards, and Grand Master of the Horse—who had been regaled in another room on turkey and other dainties, and they repaired to the Petit-Bourbon.

The evening proved anything but enjoyable to Ninon. A market-woman would have comported herself more decently than this eccentric, semi-barbarous royal person. She greeted the sallies of the actors with loud shouts of laughter, and used language that was rankly blasphemous; while she wriggled and lolled in her chair, and stretched her feet out among the footstools and cushions, in

appalling fashion. It was in vain Ninon respectfully intimated that the eyes of everybody were upon them; Christina's only reply was to beg her to let her laugh as much as ever she wanted.

The queen's liking for Ninon grew embarrassing. Six months of her constant society were almost more than the most good-natured tolerance could endure, and for that length of time the favour of the queen's presence was bestowed on Paris. Then Cardinal Mazarin, also more than tired of her, entertaining moreover, suspicions that she was brewing political mischief, contrived to tempt her to seek change of air and scene at Fontainebleau.

Christina caught the wily cardinal's bait. Very well—yes, it was a good idea. She had a great desire to see the renowned palace that Francis I. had loved so well, and to Fontainebleau, to the relief of Ninon and of divers other people, the ex-queen went: not to remain long, however. One morning, at a very early hour, the Chevalier Sentinelli arrived at the rue des Tournelles and informed Ninon that she was wanted at the Palais Royal, by his royal mistress, who had returned to Paris.

It was useless to devise some excuse for not obeying the summons — invitation, or what it might be—for that was only to bring the queen herself to the rue des Tournelles; and so to the Palais Royal Ninon went, to find Christina stretched upon a miserable pallet-bed, with an evil-smelling, just-extinguished candle on the table beside her. A serviette did duty for a night-cap, tied round her head, which was denuded of every

hair ; for she had had it shaved close on the previous night. Christina presented a strangely grotesque and wretchedly miserable picture. Seizing Ninon by both hands, she told her that she was suffering the deepest agony of mind—a grief that was horrible—and begged her to stay by her. At this moment, Sentinelli entered, and a whispered conversation ensued. "Oh, they will prevent me?" she cried then. "They will prevent me, will they? Let them dare. Am I not a queen? Have I not a right to high justice? Very well, then," she went on, when again Sentinelli had bent to whisper again. "We must dissimulate. I will go back to Fontainebleau. There at least, I can do as I please," and she prevailed on Ninon to accompany her. And there in the Galérie des Cerfs at Fontainebleau the hideous tragedy was enacted. The farce of this woman's daily life fades out in the thought of her ferocity and revengeful instincts. Monaldeschi had offended her : he had done worse, he had been treacherous towards her. Pitiless, with eyes glittering with rage and hatred, she stood in the Galérie, where the fading daylight was illumined by the flare of the torches held by her pages, and taxed the wretched culprit—pleading for mercy at her feet—with his crimes ; but it was not accorded ; "Ah, let me live!" he entreated—"let me live!"

And Ninon, who had dreaded something, but was utterly unprepared for such a frightful scene, joined her entreaties to his and to those of his confessor, the monk Lebel. "Ah, no! A woman," she sobbed, "cannot give an order for this man to die."

"I am not a woman," replied Christina; "I am a queen, and I have the right to punish a traitor." She gave the signal. There was a fearful struggle, the flash of Sentinelli's sword, an agonised cry, a crimson stream upon the floor—and then the silence of death.

It had been with extreme reluctance that Ninon had accompanied the queen to Fontainebleau; but for all Christina's enigmatical and elaborate preparations before starting, any conception of her murderous intentions did not occur to Ninon. She had grown accustomed to the royal lady's freaks and eccentricities. On this occasion, Christina had sent for a confessor, and having attired herself from head to foot in black, she knelt before him when he arrived, and first desiring Ninon not to leave the apartment, but to seat herself in a distant corner of it, she muttered out to the perplexed-looking Bishop of Amiens—whom she had sent for, he staying at that time at the Tuileries, spending a kind of brief retreat—what she had to say.

It occupied some five minutes, and as she proceeded, an expression of deep discomfiture and perplexity overspread the bishop's face. He gave her a hurried absolution, and departed, while Christina went to the chapel of the Feuillants and communicated. All these pious preparations had disarmed Ninon of any extreme of uncomfortable suspicion she might have entertained. Christina could not possibly be nursing any evil intentions—while Ninon was a woman, and curiosity had impelled her to Fontainebleau, to see what was the end of the affair, and find out the cause of such floods of tears.

In the coach with them were Monaldeschi and Sentinelli. To the first she did not address a single word throughout the journey. It was nearing five o'clock, and night was shadowing in, when they arrived; and when they had had supper, Christina commanded Monaldeschi to go to the Galérie des Cerfs, where she would presently come to him. Then she bade Sentinelli follow the count, and motioning Ninon to accompany her, she proceeded between two rows of Swiss Guards, armed with halberds tied about with black crape, to the Galérie. Now thoroughly fearful, Ninon had followed with trembling limbs. "In Heaven's name," she faltered, "what does this mean, Madame?—something terrible is about to happen." With an evil smile Christina threw open the double doors, disclosing Monaldeschi, with his hands fast bound, kneeling at the feet of Lebel, whose features were ghastly with consternation at the task imposed on him, of hearing the doomed man's confession.

At sight of Christina, Monaldeschi turned, and his agonised cry for pardon rang through the Galérie; but there was no mercy in that hideously hate-distorted face; and so, in cold blood, the murder was perpetrated, and out into the darkness Ninon rushed, calling for a carriage to bear her from the terrible place, heedless of the queen's gibes and endeavours to persuade her at least to remain till morning. It was nothing—what she had done, she said; "only a traitor had received his deserts, and the world was well rid of him."

But the coach drew up, and Ninon fled into its

shelter, never stopping till she reached home. There she took to her bed in a high state of fever, having ever before her the terrible scene of blood at Fontainebleau, and for three weeks she remained prostrated by the memory of it. She never saw Christina again, neither did Paris. Though the Court took no proceedings against her —insult to hospitality as her act was, all other considerations apart—she was avoided, and regarded with loathing, and she planned for herself a visit to England. But Cromwell had already supped full of murder. The image of it was sufficiently haunting, and the endeavours of his conscience to make peace with Heaven before he died were not to be disturbed by the presence of such a woman. He turned his face from her instead, and Christina betook herself to Rome, where she fell deep in debt, and quarrelled fiercely with the pope.

Overweening ambition was the bane of this undoubtedly clever women. In the murder at Fontainebleau, it is thought that vanity and the love of power tempted her to display what she was pleased to regard as a full length of it. Exactly the nature of Monaldeschi's offence remains unexplained. Christina said he had grossly betrayed her, and some assert that it was politically he had done so; but it seems more probable that he was a traitor in love. She defended herself by saying that she had reserved every right of life and death over all who were in her service. The atrocious deed caused a sensation in Paris; especially among

those of whom the ex-queen had been a guest, and Anne of Austria sent for Ninon to relate all the details of her fearful experience at Fontainebleau.

The chief topic of conversation and speculation now was the marriage of the young king. It was well known that Mazarin hoped to crown his successful ambitions, by marrying his niece, Marie Mancini, to Louis, and that Anne of Austria was as strongly opposed to any such alliance was equally well-known. It was her wish and her will that Louis should wed the Infanta Maria Théresa. Any thwarting of this project, the queen vowed, should bring about the setting aside of Louis, and placing her second son on the throne of France in his stead—"*La reine le veut.*" Mazarin had to bite the dust. The preliminaries for the Spanish marriage were set on foot. The French and Spanish emissaries met on the Isle of Pheasants. Poor Marie Mancini, who had a sincere affection for her young royal admirer, was sent out of the way for a month into the convent of the Daughters of Calvary, which was hard by Ninon's house. Louis whispered in her ear at parting, that if the king was separated from her, the man would never cease to think of her. Then he whistled to his dogs, and with his courtly train went hunting in the woods of Chambord. So ended the love-story of Mazarin's niece, Marie Mancini. So much "for the snows of yester year"; but there had been warm affection between Ninon and the young girl, and they parted with many tears.

CHAPTER XIV

Les Précieuses Ridicules—Sappho and *Le Grand Cyrus*—The Poets of the Latin Quarter—The Satire which Kills—A Lost Child—Periwigs and New Modes—The Royal Marriage and a Grand Entry.

MOLIÈRE'S comedy, *Le Cocu Imaginaire*—which had created such unrestrainable delight in the ex-queen of Sweden—had been preceded a year earlier by the famous *Précieuses Ridicules*. To call this play the dramatist's masterpiece, is to do rank injustice to his work of greater length and importance, notably, if one dare to choose, to *Le Tartufe*. The *Précieuses*, however, took Paris by storm, and was accounted a gem. Still a delightful little bit of humour, and not lacking now in its way of a home-thrust, it carried a double-edged power in the days of the Hôtel de Rambouillet, when the affectations of speech and conversation had run to such absurd extravagance, that Molière's satire was little or no exaggeration. Mademoiselle de Scudéri's "*Inutile! retranchez le superflu de cet ardente*," is distinctly precious.

Of the queens of these intellectual *réunions*, Mademoiselle de Scudéri was the reigning novelist. Her long life, exceeding Ninon's in years, was devoted to the production of romances and the lighter sort of literature, which ran to a lengthy record. *Le Grand Cyrus* stands best remembered, but is scarcely more than a memory. A long day's

journey would be needed to find the most ardent of fiction-readers who would now care to follow through the windings of that romance which in its day created such enthusiasm, and made a lioness of the amiable if some way from beautiful Madeleine de Scudéri. *Artamène; ou, le Grand Cyrus*, after all, was, to be sure, scarcely fiction. It was composed of little more than thinly-veiled facts, presenting under classic names the living men and women of society; heroes and heroines of antiquity stood sponsors to the fine, broad-skirted, perruqued gentlemen and fashionable dames of Versailles and the Louvre and the Palais Royal. Artaban, Agathyse, Zenocrates—these were, in their modish habit as they lived, severally the Duc de St Bignon, M. de Rainez, M. Ysern, and others — while Mademoiselle de Scudéri herself was Sappho. It was in her salon that was drawn up the famous *Carte du Tendre*—gazetteer of articles necessary to the pursuit of love. Mademoiselle de Scudéri wrote with grace and much sense; but her romances were insufferably prolix. Ninon found them wearisome to a degree, even though the *Grand Cyrus* is a record of the great Prince de Condé. George de Scudéri, Madeleine's brother, was also a very fertile novelist of his day, scarcely to be rivalled in speed of production by Dumas himself. Nor does there appear that the ghosts who worked for this great, more modern enchanter of the realm of historical romance, rendered any services to the seventeenth-century novelist. The salons of Madame de Rambouillet and of Madame de Sablé

were the rendezvous of the most aristocratic of these versifiers and epigram-makers, who really occasionally uttered something witty or poetical; though for the most part the wit and poetry did not rise above such greatness as that of Sir Benjamin Backbite, in Lady Sneerwell's drawing-room, on the macaroni ponies whose

> "Legs were so slim,
> And their tails were so long."

The refinements and elegance of speech to be heard at those *réunions*, fostered, and indeed were a powerful influence in, the reformation effected by the Académie for the French language. But the passion for these improvements was often torn to tatters, and the puerilities and affectations excited a reaction among men of the more Bohemian class of writers and versifiers, such as Scarron, St Amand and others, and the curious mixture of real poetic expression and thought, profanity and coarseness, in their productions, carry back to the days of Rabelais and of Villon, with echoes of Ronsard and of Charles of Orleans. But the simplicity and beauty of their numbers only now and again shone through the grossness of their compositions, and sheer opposition to the "Clélies" and "Uranies" and "Sapphos" probably inspired the numerous parodies and the odes to cheese and good feeding produced by these authors, who hailed with delight the now famous actor-manager Molière's *Précieuses Ridicules*.

The piece was first produced at the Petit-Bourbon

early in the winter of 1659. The plot, deep-laid if simple, consists of the successful playing off by two lovers respectively of the two charming young women they love honestly and deeply, but who meet refusal on the score of their language being too natural, and their attire not sufficiently fashionable. The two young men thereupon dress up their valets, Mascarille and Jodelet, in fine costumes, bestow on them the titles of marquis and vicomte, and contrive to introduce them to the *précieuses*. The exquisite humour of the dialogue between Gorgibus, the father of one of the two girls, and uncle of the other, sets the ball rolling; his contempt for the new names, Aminte and Policène, which they have selected in place of those given them, as he says, by their godfathers and godmothers; his dim grasp of what he calls their jargon, when they try to instil into him some idea of its elegancies, is the essence of genuine comicality, as are the compliments of the two aristocratic visitors who inform the ladies that it is the reports of their exquisite attractions and beauty, reaching far and wide, which has brought them to their feet. Then follows the flutter of delight, veiled under the attempt at calm graciousness, of the *précieuses*. "But Monsieur," says Cathos to Mascarille, the marquis, inviting him to sit down, "I entreat you not to be inexorable to this armchair, which has been stretching out its arms to you for this quarter of an hour past; allow it the satisfaction of embracing you." The fun grows apace, as the slips of tongue and bearing of the two pretended gentle-

men begin to disconcert the two infatuated girls. At last a dance is proposed, the fiddlers are sent for, and behind them enter the two masters of the valets, who tear their fine coats off their backs, and turn them out. "And you," says Gorgibus, chasing the *précieuses* from the room, to repent at leisure of their affectations and thirst for *la galantérie*, "out of my sight, and to the devil with all these verses, romances, sonnets, and the rest of it—pernicious amusements of do-nothings and idlers!" So the curtain descended on the *Précieuses Ridicules*, and the story goes that before very long the play extinguished the glory of the salon of the Hôtel de Rambouillet.

The Comte de Fiesque, who had gone with Condé to Spain, was killed in Catalonia by the bursting of a bomb. Ninon, not able personally to ask the widow where the child was which de Fiesque regarded as his, commissioned two persons to ascertain for her from Madame de Fiesque some intelligence concerning its whereabouts, but the countess asserted that she had no knowledge of this. The remorse and regret of Ninon were of no avail: she was unable to trace the lost one.

At last, after long negotiations, Maria Théresa of Austria was united to Louis XIV. This brought Condé back to allegiance to France, by the Peace of the Pyrenees, effected by Cardinal Mazarin, one of the few of his achievements which really benefited France. Ninon was one in the gorgeous cortège which proceeded to Grosbois, beyond Charenton, to receive the young princess. It was

a brilliant show. The fashions of the early days of the young king had greatly changed since his father's time, which was so greatly distinguished, at least as far as male attire went, for its elegant simplicity. Bright hues had superseded the black, the beautiful but sombre colouring of the material of the silk or satin or velvet doublets with large, loose slashed sleeves; the falling bands of rich point lace; the long, straight, fringed or pointed breeches meeting down to the lace-ruffled or lawn wide-topped boots, and the eminently graceful Flemish plumed beaver hat. In place of the long hair waving to the neck, full-bottomed periwigs had come into vogue; the doublets were short and waistcoatless, displaying a bulging shirt-front, tied with ribbons to the nether garments, which, like the large loose sleeves, were covered with points and bows; deep lace ruffles drooped from the knees, and only the falling collar, with a hat higher crowned than of yore, but still plumed, remained of the old style.

It was to the beauty of Louis XIV.'s hair when he was a little boy, that the huge, hideous periwigs seem to owe their invention. Nature's ruling has its exceptions in the bestowal of naturally curling head-covering, and desiring to offer the sincerest flattery of imitation, the French courtiers and the ingenuity of the coiffeurs combined to invent the huge periwigs, which in some sort of fashion even contrived to live through the French Revolution and the Térror itself; for did not Robespierre preside at the great Feast of the Supreme Being in about the

ugliest, primmest bobtail wig ever fashioned on barber's block?

As to the women's dress in France, it varied somewhat according to their rank. Middle-class bourgeoises wore the scantiest covering out-of-doors on their necks and shoulders; not even in church was their attire more modest. To so scandalous a length was this carried, that it brought on them more than one remonstrance from the pulpit; and Englishwomen, taking as always, their fashions from Paris, followed suit. A Nonconformist English divine published a translation of a French work by "A grave and learned Papist"—possibly the Curé of St Etienne—who reprehended in no measured terms the "shameful enormity," as he phrased it, of this style of dress. The ladies of the great world ordinarily went with more circumspection in the streets, and nearly always, also, they wore a mask. It was generally made of black velvet, lined with white satin. It fixed itself on the face with a spring, and was fastened with a thin wire, which was terminated by a glass button that could be dropped between the lips, and so disguise the voice. The female style of dressing the hair was to gather it up in a bunch at the crown of the head, leaving some curls to hang on each side of the face; over this was placed a sort of little linen hood, the points of which usually reached to the shoulders. The gowns were wide-sleeved and long-waisted, with a skirt embroidered or trimmed with lace. A small dog was almost indispensable to a lady of fashion. The little creatures were very

pretty, generally having pointed muzzles and ears. Women took snuff and smoked, and the traces of these habits were apt to leave their ugly reminders about their persons and dress.

A great many new streets and houses were added to the city. The increase in the number of public vehicles rendered the streets very noisy, while the filth of the ways was indescribable ; but this did not hinder women from walking in velvet slippers, or pages and lackeys from wearing bright, gold-laced scarlet livery.

The state of morals, from highest to lowest, was at a low ebb. Vice permeated every class, from the clergy and nobility to the dregs of the populace. Murder and barefaced robbery took place constantly in the streets ; the rage for gambling was boundless, and the cardinal-minister made no attempt to check the shameful licence of the green tables.

Yet Paris was fair and brilliant to the eye when Maria Théresa made her entry in the most magnificent carriage of the cortège which occupied three hours in passing. The princess was not beautiful ; but her expression was amiable, and her complexion very fair for a Spanish woman. She wore a mantle of violet velvet embroidered with golden *fleur-de-lis* over a robe of white brocade covered all down the front with a splendid *rivière* of emeralds, and she wore her crown with infinite grace and dignity.

The fierce light that beats upon the lives of kings and queens was at its fiercest when cast upon the life of the Sun-King. His marriage with

the Spanish princess was one of policy and convenience, and as such there have been unions more disastrous. If love played no great part in it, at least the king was true to the dignity and a certain gentle courtesy and good-nature underlying the pomp and extravagant display with which he was pleased to surround himself; and Maria Théresa's record of a queen's life bears no startling evidence of unhappiness or discontent—something indeed to the contrary.

CHAPTER XV

Réunions—The Scarrons—The Fête at Vaux—The Little Old Man in the Dressing-gown—Louise de la Vallière—How the Mice Play when the Cat's Away—"Pauvre Scarron"—An Atrocious Crime.

THE return of St Evrémond brought about the restoration of the old pleasant Monday and Friday *réunions* of the rue des Tournelles—whose regularity so many untoward events had greatly and for so long interfered with.

Ninon could afford to dispense with the less interesting society of the Louvre, where, except for Madame de Choisy's friendship, no very cordial hand had ever been extended to her; while the cultured, refined Bohemianism of her salon was probably more acceptable to many of her distinguished friends. They at all events gathered there numerously. Monsieur de la Rochefoucauld, ever faithful to the beautiful Duchesse de Longueville; Condé; the brilliant society doctor of his day and memoir writer, Guy Patin; Monsieur de la Châtre, also a chronicler of his period; Monsieur de Villarceaux, Corneille, whose tragedy of *Œdipus* brought him back in high-heaped measure the success which had waned since the production of *The Cid*, so greatly that he had nearly lost heart for dramatic work; Molière—these two the brightest and best-beloved stars of Ninon's firmament. Monsieur Voiture was now no more. His empty niche was filled by Boileau, who intro-

duced to her his young friend, Racine. Occasionally, by kind permission only of Madame de la Sablière, came la Fontaine. Among the ladies of her company were Madame de la Fayette, the authoress of *Zaïde* and of the *Princesse de Clèves;* Madame Deshoulières, called "the French Calliope"; and, as healing Time's wings now and again bring, it was Molière himself who effected pleasant relations once more with Julie de Rambouillet, now Duchesse de Montausier; Madeleine de Scudéri, the distinguished *précieuse*, held aloof.

On Wednesdays the Scarrons received their friends, most of those the same as Ninon's. Françoise had now long been the wife of Scarron, and his wit and her beauty attracted a numerous company. The brother of Françoise had not mended his ways. He was still the ne'er-do-well result of his miserable bringing up; yet there was something not to dislike, even something of a soul of good in d'Aubigné's evil. The poor crippled poet and his wife were happy in their union. Scarron had indeed but two faults to find in his Françoise—one of them to wit, that she devoted herself too closely to him, at the sacrifice of health and spirits. She had copied all his *Roman Comique* for him in her beautiful handwriting, and Scarron, noting that she looked pale and fatigued, begged Ninon to take her about a little with her into the gaieties of life.

Scarron's chronic ailments had not affected his appetite; possibly amusement being necessarily very restricted for him, his naturally gourmand proclivities had increased. This was to such an

extent, that his wife went ever in fear of his indigestions, and when he suggested that she would be so much better for occasional absences from home, Ninon did not ascribe it to pure and simple anxiety for Françoise, but also to his seizing a better chance for eating three times as much as was good for him. Her vigilance in this particular was the other defect he perceived in her. The desired opportunity, however, soon presented itself.

Monsieur Fouquet, the powerful superintendent of finance, was a friend of Ninon—that and nothing more—and one day he confided to her that he had fallen in love with the daughter of the *maître d'hôtel* of the Duc d'Orléans, and desired to ask her hand in marriage. He hoped, in fact believed, that she was not indifferent to him; but to make certain, he asked Ninon, such an adept in the tender passion, as he said, to watch her at the great fête he was about to give at his magnificent estate at Vaux. It was to be on a superb scale. All the Court, with all the Upper Ten, were invited guests. They were to appear in masquerade costume. Ninon, holding that the good turn Monsieur Fouquet sought of her, merited his ever generous consideration, asked him to allow her to bring a lady friend with her to the fête; this favour he accorded with great pleasure, and Ninon delightedly informed Madame Scarron that she was the chosen friend. Equally delighted, Madame Scarron selected her fancy costume; it was that of a Normandy shepherdess, and confectioned with all the good taste of Françoise. The tunic was of yellow cloth, with

Venice point undersleeves, her collarette was of Flemish lace, and Ninon lent her some of her diamonds wherewith to adorn her ribbon-tied crook. Ninon's costume was composed of pearl-grey satin, trimmed with silver lace stitched with rose-coloured silk, an apron of black velvet, and a cap plumed with crimson feathers.

With many instructions to Nanon Balbien, the maid-servant, to take good care of her master, and to keep a close eye on him at meal-time, Madame Scarron drove away in the coach with Ninon to Vaux, where they duly arrived.

Le Nôtre, the royal gardener, had received orders to construct a splendid ball-room in the middle of the park, and, in the depths of winter though it was, he achieved a triumph of gorgeous magnificence. Orange trees were massed within the huge tent, and flowers of every hue were brought together from every hothouse and possible quarter, to render the scene a veritable fairyland, glowing in the thousand lamps depending from the gilded chains winding amid the sheeny foliage.

But who has not heard of that fête, the ill-omened thing that brought its lavish giver disaster? Among the guests—named indeed first on the list of the invited—was she whom Fouquet sought to honour, perhaps even for whom he organised the entertainment—Louise de la Vallière; and among the male masquers dancing *vis-à-vis* to her, murmuring low as they met, was one habited as an old man in a dressing-gown, domino sort of cloak, who was, in sooth, but a young man, the king, Louis XIV.

It was not the first dawning of their love that night at Vaux. Already, at a ball at the Louvre, Louis had given her a rose, one that was incomparable for sweet perfume and loveliness. Innocent or politically guilty, it was all one for the great superintendent of finance. He had dared to love the woman Louis loved, and the doom of Fouquet was sealed.

And the merry going out of Ninon and her friend also found a mournful coming in; for when they arrived in Paris next morning and Françoise alighted from the coach, Nanon hurried to the door to meet her. "Ah, mademoiselle—madame!" she cried, with a face wild with distress and terror, "he is dying! he is dying!—my poor master!"

"*Bonte divine!* how did it come about?" asked the two ladies in a breath.

Nothing more simple. The master, to begin with, immediately on the departure of Ninon and his wife for Vaux, had despatched Nanon with a note to his good-for-nothing brother-in-law. D'Aubigné, having read the note, said that it was all right, and he would come and pass the evening with Monsieur Scarron. Nanon, thus feeling herself free also to enjoy an evening out like the rest, spent it with Jean Claude, a young man cousin of hers; but when at a fairly decent hour she returned home, an appalling picture met her eyes. On the table prepared for supper, lay, or stood as might be, seven empty bottles, the bones of a capon on the empty plates, with the crumbs of two Chartres pasties, and an empty Strasburg goose pot, also well cleared, madame's brother under the table, and Monsieur

Scarron lying back in his wheel-chair, waxen-white, speechless, but convulsed with a hiccough, a terrible hiccough that had never ceased all night, Nanon said.

"Fly for a doctor!" cried Ninon.

And one of grave and profoundly calm aspect appeared, and proceeded to examine his unconscious patient's condition; then he shook his head. "He is a dead man," he said.

"Ah, quick, Nanon! Quick to the rue de l'Arbre Sec, for Doctor Guy Patin."

"What!" cried the doctor, with almost a yell of horror, "the foe to antimony! I would sooner see the devil himself!" and he fled; for the battle of antimony was at fierce pitch just then. As a medicinal agent it was opposed by the medical profession to such an extent, that the Parliament of Paris forbade its use; although already many of the profession were as strongly in its favour. Meanwhile Ninon sprinkled the face and hands of the sick man with cold water. He opened his eyes and recognised the two.

"Ah!" murmured he, "what a delicious supper. In this world, I fear, I shall never have another like it."

"We have sent for Guy Patin. He will cure you."

"Guy Patin?—yes, he is a grand creature; but, ah!"—and the hiccough, which had momentarily ceased, recommenced. "Well, people don't die of a hiccough, I suppose," went on Scarron—alas! for the mistake!—"but that goose, and the pasty, how

excellent they were! Take your pen, dearest Françoise—it is indigestion—yes, but one of rhymes—till Guy Patin comes. I will see what rhyming will do for me—some good, surely, for my rhymes shall be of Ninon. Take your pen, Françoise, and write."

And as well as she could for her tears, the poor wife wrote Scarron's swan's-song in praise of Ninon. "Well, are they detestable?" he asked then, between the never-ceasing convulsion of hiccoughs. "No matter. I have rhymed—on my death-bed—for it is useless to deceive myself—I—I die." One last convulsion, that shook his whole distorted frame, seized him, and he fell back dead.

Then from the depths of the room loomed a dishevelled figure. It was d'Aubigné. "Dead!" he murmured, leaning over the corpse of his boon companion. "Well, he ate—all—and I—drank all. *De profundis*"—and he shuffled out.

Guy Patin entered, but all was of no avail now for "*le pauvre* Scarron," as he called himself.

No ordinary character of a man was the first husband of Françoise d'Aubigné, the woman he so sincerely loved and admired, so disinterestedly loved, that he would, had she desired, have denied himself the happiness of living in her society—for he had offered her the choice of placing her *en pension* in a convent at the expense of his own scanty incomings. Driven from his rights as a child, gifted with great wit and talent, and a generous kindliness, he was beloved by a large circle of friends. First the victim of cruel, iniquitous neglect,

oftentimes his own enemy, the crosses of life never blighted the gifts of his intellect, or, it may be added, of his industry. In straitened conditions touching on absolute poverty, the *gaieté du cœur* of Paul Scarron never forsook him, and if he could have lived a while longer, for his own sake, as he certainly would for hers for whose future he was ever anxious—he said with that labouring dying breath, that he could not have supposed it so easy to make a joke of death.

He had composed his own epitaph long before—

> "He who lies sleeping here beneath,
> Scant envy but great pity won,
> A thousand times he suffered death,
> Or ere his life was lost and done.
> Oh, Stranger, as you pass, tread light,
> Awaken not his slumbers deep,
> For this, bethink you's the first night
> That poor Scarron is getting sleep."

A terrible event—that thrilled society, and indeed everyone, with horror—occurred in the South of France about this time. To the Court at Paris it struck especially home; inasmuch as the victim of the fiendish perpetrators of the crime was the Marquise de Castellana, at the time of her presentation at Versailles. She was then very young. She brought her husband, a grandson of the Duc de Villars, an immense fortune, and her beauty was so remarkable as to distinguish her amid the many beautiful women of the young king's Court. Louis, indeed, showed her marked attentions, and she was known as the beautiful Provençale. Very soon,

however, the marquis, who was in the naval service, perished in a shipwreck; and a crowd of young and titled men flocked around the lovely young widow as suitors for her hand. Her choice fell on young Lanède, Marquis de Ganges, and for the first year or so of their married life they were very happy in their home at Avignon. Then slight disagreements arose between them. He began to yield to dissipation, while he accused her of coquetry. More than that he could not apparently bring against her. He had two brothers, the Abbé and the Chevalier de Ganges, and both these men fell deeply in love with their beautiful sister-in-law. In his capacity of a churchman, the young wife confided many of her thoughts and her affairs to the abbé. This he used as a tool to influence his brother, the marquis, as it better suited his own designs, either to ruffle his anger against her, or to smooth it. Then one day he pleaded his own passion to her. She repulsed him. The chevalier made a similar attempt, and was similarly rejected. Furious at this, they made common cause, and vowed to be revenged on her. First they attempted to poison her by putting some deadly stuff in her chocolate, but for some reason the attempt failed. It is thought that the deadly properties of the poison they used, were nullified by the milk, and she experienced no more than a passing uneasiness. Rumours of the attempt began, however, to circulate in Avignon and the neighbourhood; and the marquis proposed to his wife that they should go to his castle at Ganges to spend the autumn. She consented; though with some misgiving. The

Castle of Ganges was a gloomy place surrounded on all sides by sombre avenues and densely-growing trees. After a short time spent with his wife at Ganges, the marquis returned to Avignon, leaving her in the care of his two brothers. A little while previously, a further large inheritance had fallen in to her, and she had begun to have such suspicions of the integrity of the family to which she had allied herself, that she made a will, confiding, in the event of her death, all her property to her mother, in trust, till her children, of which she had two or three, should be of age. The abbé and the chevalier, discovering what she had done, never ceased their endeavours to persuade her to revoke this will. What successful arguments they could have used to effect this, it is difficult to conceive—unless they employed threats—and these possibly they did use; since, after another abortive attempt to poison her, they one day entered her bedchamber, where she lay slightly indisposed with some passing ailment. The abbé approached her with a pistol in one hand and a cup of poison in the other, the chevalier following with a drawn sword in his hand. "You must die, madame," said the abbé, pointing to the three fearful means for accomplishing the purpose. "The choice of the manner of it is to you." The unfortunate woman sprang from her bed, and fell at the feet of the two men, asking what crime she had committed. "Choose!" was all the answer.

Resistance was hopeless, and the unhappy lady took the cup of poison and drank its contents, while the abbé held the pistol at her breast. Then the

two assassins departed from the room, and locking her in, promised to send her the confessor she begged for.

Directly she was alone she tried to choke back the poison, by forcing a lock of her hair down her throat; then, clad only in her nightdress, she clambered to the window and let herself drop to the ground, lying nearly eight yards below. That the exits and doors were all watched she had little enough doubt; but by the aid of a servant, who let her out by a stable door, she gained the fields. The two men caught sight of her, and pursuing her to a farmhouse where she had sought refuge, they represented her as a mad-woman, and the chevalier hunted her from room to room of the house, till he trapped her in a remote chamber, where he stabbed her with his sword, dealing two thrusts in the breast, and five in the back, as she turned in the last endeavour to escape. Part of the sword-blade had remained in her shoulder, so violent was the blow. The piercing cries of the unhappy lady now brought a crowd of the people of the neighbourhood round the place; and among them the abbé, who had remained without to prevent any effort on her part to escape. Anxious to see whether she was dead, he presented his pistol at her, but it missed fire. This drew upon him the attention of the crowd, and they rushed to capture him; but with a desperate struggle he got away.

The marquise lived for nineteen days after this fearful scene; but all hope of life was gone. The corroding poison had done its fell work. Her

husband was with her in her last moments, and she strove in her dying agonies to clear him of complicity in the foul murder; but the evidence against him was too strong, and the Parliament of Toulouse condemned him to confiscation of his property, degradation from his rank of nobility, and perpetual banishment. The chevalier escaped to Malta, where he soon after died, fighting against the Turks. The abbé fled to Holland, and assuming another name, his identity was lost. It is said that this horrible crime was but the prologue to many subsequent iniquitous adventures in which he was the prime mover. The sentence of being broken on the wheel which was passed on these two criminals, and was too good for them, they thus contrived to evade. Their execrable record lives among the long list of Causes Celébres of the time.[1]

[1] Gayot de Pitaval, *Causes Celébres*.

CHAPTER XVI

A *Lettre de Cachet*—Mazarin's dying Counsel—Madame Scarron continues to Receive—Fouquet's intentions and what came of them—The Squirrel and the Snake—The Man in the Iron Mask—An Incommoding Admirer—"Calice cher, ou le parfum n'est plus"—The Roses' Sepulchre.

It was in the very presence of the dead Scarron that Ninon was informed of the danger threatening St Evrémond. A *lettre de cachet* had been issued for conveying him to the Bastille, for the offence he had given in writing some satirical verses on the Peace of the Pyrenees. St Evrémond was very far from standing alone in his opinions on this treaty carried through by Mazarin; but he was unapproachable in the expression of them. Biting invective and caustic wit at the cardinal's expense were graven in every line of his couplets, addressed to the Marquis de Créqui. Nor did the mockery cease at that point; it ridiculed the royal marriage itself, and the king was furious. This was the second time that St Evrémond had incurred the displeasure of Mazarin; on the first occasion, a reconciliation had been patched up, after a three months' sojourn for St Evrémond in the Bastille, but this time he was past forgiveness—possibly, as it has been surmised, that in addition to the verses, he had given secret offence to the Court—and it was now but a matter of tracking St Evrémond to his hiding-place; for he had been warned of the letter

of arrest for shutting him up in the Bastille, probably this time for the rest of his life. He had found refuge in the convent of the Capucins du Roule; but already his goods and money were confiscated, and it was Ninon who carried him, from her own resources, the necessary notes and gold for his getting away under cover of the night to Havre, where he arrived safely, and took ship for Dover, never to return to France.

The Majesty of Louis XIV. was as a thing divine; and the faintest shadow could not be permitted to cross the glory of that sun he chose for his double-mottoed device. Cardinal Mazarin, now at the point of death, renewed his counsel to the young king never to let will thwart his, but ever to bear the sceptre in his hand—in his own hand alone. So Mazarin, dealing his parting thrust of revenge on the queen-regent, died in the castle of Vincennes, unregretted by any, tolerated of later years, but despised by all. Someone made his epitaph, whose concluding lines were to the effect that having cheated and deceived through life, he ended with cheating the devil himself, since, when he came to fetch away his soul, he found he had not one.

Madame Scarron, after her husband's death, decided to live in the same apartments, in preference to the home which Ninon offered her in her own house. The widow's friends obtained for her a pension of two thousand livres, and she continued the old *réunions*, and soon recovered from the loss she had sustained; for Françoise d'Aubigné was ever distinguished by her calm, equable temperament.

After the fête at Vaux, Monsieur Fouquet, continuing his attentions to Mademoiselle de la Baume, finally asked her hand in marriage of her parents. They were well pleased, especially her father. Madame de la Baume would have seemed more to favour another destiny for her daughter. The king was enraged on learning the superintendent's proposal, but Fouquet braved the royal displeasure, and intended to take his bride to Holland. So the man proposed; but the Fates had otherwise disposed. Within a few hours, a letter was brought him; he broke the seal hurriedly, recognising the beloved handwriting, and when he had read the letter—but two lines long—he sank back in his chair as if a thunder-stroke had smitten him.

"Renounce me. Think of me no more. I am not worthy to be the wife of an honest man. LOUISE."

It needed no more. Fouquet divined the truth, and he broke into a storm of invective, and abuse of the king. To silence him, to warn him of the perils surrounding him, of his many bitter and jealous enemies, of the clouds of witnesses, false and true, ready and waiting to bring charges of peculation and misappropriation of finances against him, was of no avail. The fire of disappointed love consumed him, and he raged against the despoiler of his happiness. The jealous king, informed by those who had heard Fouquet's wild words, had waited not an instant, and thirty soldiers of the Guard were on the way to the Hôtel of the Superintendence to arrest him; but warned of their coming, he made his escape from the house. Too late. Before he

could reach the frontier he was taken; and in the fortress of Pignerol he spent nineteen years a prisoner, after a protracted trial before a packed tribunal, and nobly defended by Advocate Pelisson, his devoted friend, a devotion for which Pelisson suffered long imprisonment in the Bastille.

The jealousy of Louis in regard to Mademoiselle la Vallière, however, probably only hastened the fall of the man on whose ruin Colbert, comptroller-general of finances, and his successor, had long been determined. On the walls of that magnificent Vaux mansion of Fouquet's was painted and carved his crest—a squirrel with the device, "*Quo non ascendam?*" This squirrel was pursued by a snake, and on the arms of Colbert was also a snake.

The lavish extravagance of Fouquet was almost beyond the bounds of credibility. He stopped before no expenditure for indulgence of his own pleasure, and in fairness it must be added, for that of others. Courteous and kindly, intellectually gifted, his open-handed generosity to men of letters and of talent generally was boundless. Like our own "great lord cardinal," "though he was unsatisfied in getting, yet in bestowing he was most generous," and again and again he aided the State with money from his own private means. It is said that at the fateful entertainment at Vaux, to which Louis XIV. was invited, each of the nobles found a purse of gold in his bedchamber, "and," adds the same writer, "the nobles did not forget to take it away." When his disgrace came, it was the great who deserted him; the people of talent clung through-

out to their friend and benefactor. Colbert, his deadliest foe, artfully instilled into Louis that it was the ambition of Fouquet to be prime minister. There is little doubt that this was true. Colbert's ambition for the post was not less.

On his arrest, Fouquet was first sent to the castle of Angers, thence to Amboise, thence to Moret and Vincennes, then he was lodged in the Bastille, and finally, on his condemnation, to the fortress of Pignerol. After a three years' trial, the advocate-general demanded that he should be hanged on a gallows purposely erected in the court-yard of the Palais de Justice, but the votes for his death were far in the minority, greatly to the fury of Louis and of Colbert. While abuse, however, and charges of maladministration of the finances were brought against him, peculation could not in any way be established. In a generation of time-serving and venality, the staunch devotion and affection of Fouquet's friends remained unchangeable. "Never," wrote Voltaire, "did a placeman have more personal friends; never was persecuted man better served in his misfortunes."

Madame de Sévigné, who had a warm regard for Fouquet, expresses her fear in more than one of her letters, that he may be secretly done to death by poison or by some other means of Colbert's devising. His friends suffered cruelly, in many cases, for their loyalty to him. The gentleman, Monsieur de Roquesante, who had spoken in favour of him—a Provençal—was banished in the depths of winter to the chills of Lower Brittany, and the members of

Fouquet's family were scattered, to find shelter where they could.

At Pignerol, Fouquet was treated with great rigour. Some few months after his arrival there, a peril of another kind came very near to him. The lightning of a heavy thunderstorm struck the powder-magazine of the fortress, and it exploded, burying many in its ruins. Fouquet, who was standing at the moment in the recess of a window, remained unhurt. Mystery hangs over the last days of his life; for while it is said that he died in his captivity at Pignerol, his friend Gourville states that he was set at liberty before his death. Voltaire also declares that Fouquet's daughter-in-law, the Comtesse de Vaux, confirmed the fact of this to him. Another surmise, and one that found wide acceptance, is that although he was liberated for a while, he was rearrested, and that it was he who was the mysterious individual known as the Man in the Iron Mask.

Human Nature loves a mystery, and would resent being deprived of this most memorable enigma in modern history, by any reasonable and certain solution of it, could it be beyond all doubt and question established. Again and again it has been explained and explained away, but it is, as Galileo declared of the earth and the sun: *e pur se muove.* The Man in the Iron Mask stands the Man in the Iron Mask—which was, in fact, not of iron, at all, but of stoutly-lined velvet, as the *loups* and masks of the time nearly always were made. Probably this mask was secured by extra strong springs and fastenings, as mostly was the case for prisoners of

distinction, when they were being conveyed from one place of captivity to another.

Such kind of explanation was afforded to Ninon by the governor of the Bastille when she discussed the point with him. There was, he said, no mystery at all in it. Yet the possibility remains that it did not suit the governor of the grim old prison-house absolutely to lift the veil covering its secrets, even to Ninon.

It has been contended that it could not have been Fouquet; since the Iron Mask's death is recorded in the register of the Bastille, where he was confined for the last five years of his life in November 1703, and Fouquet, at that date, would have been in extreme old age, which this prisoner was still short of. Not being Fouquet, was it Count Matthioli accused of betraying the French Government, in the matter of putting a French garrison into Casale to defend it against Spain? Was it the Duke of Monmouth, after all not beheaded in England? Was it the child of Buckingham, the bitter fruit of his intrigue with Anne of Austria? Was it the twin brother she was said to have borne with Louis XIV., as Dumas tells—he who was taken by d'Artagnan from the Bastille, and placed on the throne of France, while the other Louis was shut up in his stead, the substitution remaining undiscovered, so great was the resemblance between the two—undetected by the queen, Maria Théresa, herself. The romance is well founded, but even for the great master of romance it goes far. Was it— No; the mystery, like Sheridan's quarrel, is "a very pretty mystery as it stands. We should only spoil it by trying to explain it."

Ninon was troubled at this time with an unsatisfactory, rather casual admirer, Monsieur le Comte de Choiseul, an individual of whom it was difficult for her to decide whether his pertinacity or his supreme self-conceit predominated. Monsieur Précourt, the celebrated dancer, an intimate acquaintance of hers, whom she one morning invited to breakfast with her, did her the good service of finally relieving her of de Choiseul's incommoding presence. The breakfast was laid for two, and Choiseul, entering, was about to seat himself, whereupon Précourt claimed the place at table, and Choiseul, declining to stir, Précourt invited him to adjourn to the neighbouring boulevard with him, and settle the matter at the sword's-point. Choiseul replied that he did not fight with mountebanks. That was as well, Précourt retorted, since they might make him dance; and the unwelcome one took his hat, went out from the house, and did not return.

The *liaison* of Louis with Mademoiselle de la Vallière was now generally known; and notwithstanding the warning of the disgrace and banishment of St Evrémond, satirical rhymes began to circulate at the expense of the royal favourite and her lover *Deodatus*. How fortunate he was, said Bussy Rabutin, "in pressing his lips on that wide beak, which stretched from ear to ear"; and forthwith the poet found himself lodged in the Bastille.

Physically, the beauty of La Vallière was not flawless. Her mouth was somewhat large; but it has frequently been said, that somehow the defect of her lameness only added to the grace of her

movements, which were at once so gentle and dignified, while her magnificent, dark dreamy eyes and her soft winning smile rendered her singularly charming; and if Louis ever loved any but himself, it was Louise de la Vallière, who so passionately loved, not Louis the king, but the ardent wooer and winner of her heart. There is a story of the rose-tree from which Louis plucked the rose which he offered her on that ball night in the Louvre. It had been cultivated by le Nôtre, the famous gardener of Versailles, and was an object of his tenderest care; so much cherished, that he was far from pleased when he saw the king pluck its loveliest blossom for la Vallière. She regarded the rose-tree which had borne it with the tenderness one feels for some beloved sentient thing, enlisting le Nôtre's interest in it, which in its way was as great as her own; and wherever she went to spend any length of days, the rose-tree was transported in its box of earth to the gardens of the palace—Versailles or the Louvre, as it might be—and for two years the beautiful bush flourished under the joint care of le Nôtre, and of the king's beloved mistress. And in her gentle confidences with Mademoiselle Athénais de Mortemar, the *fiancée* of Monsieur le Marquis de Montespan, with whom she was great friends, she told her the romance of her rose, and how it was her belief, her superstition—call it what you will—that while it flourished, Louis's love would be hers.

And then all at once the rose-tree began to fade. Slowly but surely, despite all the skill of le Nôtre, rapidly it withered, and he carried a handful of the

earth of the new box, into which he had transplanted the tree, as a last resource, to a chemist for analysation. Nothing more simple: vitriol had been poured on the earth, a drop or two at a time, and the root was corroded to dry threads. And for la Vallière, it was only left to make a little mausoleum for her rose-tree in the shadow of a retired thicket round the bosquets of Versailles—a little crystal globe upon a low marble stand; and within it, in a box exquisitely enriched with gold filigree, the withered rose-tree, to one of whose branches was fastened the faded rose, whose petals still hung together; and thither to the secluded spot every day came la Vallière to kneel at the tomb of her rose-tree, and kiss the shadowy souvenir of the love that had faded for ever. Just a few petals left of its countless leaves, so sweet and glowing once in their crimson beauty.

And Mademoiselle Athénais de Mortemar's nuptials with Monsieur le Marquis de Montespan having been solemnised, the wife was left by the complaisant husband to become the second mistress of Louis XIV., and this ere the first was discarded, and Maria Théresa still a youthful wife. The two children of la Vallière the king legitimised by Act of Parliament; but soon Louise was seen no more at Court. She found refuge and rest for weariness and regrets of heart and spirit within convent walls.

And now Anne of Austria succumbed to the fell disease which had insidiously attacked her, and she died, and was borne to St Dénis with great pomp, followed by Louis the king, clad in deepest mourning.

CHAPTER XVII

A Fashionable Water-cure Resort—M. de Roquelaure and his Friends—Louis le Grand—"A Favourite with the Ladies"—The Broken Sword—A *Billet-doux*—La Vallière and la Montespan—The Rebukes from the Pulpit—Putting to the Test—*Le Tartufe*—The Triumphs of Molière—The Story of Clotilde.

By the advice of Guy Patin, Ninon's constant friend and medical adviser, she went to drink the chalybeate waters of Forges les Eaux, in Picardy. Not that there was the least thing the matter with her; only, as the wise doctor said, "Prevention was better than cure." Besides, well or ailing, everybody of any consequence went there; it was the thing to do, ever since Anne of Austria had taken a course of the waters, and a short time after had given birth to the child Louis, the heir to the throne of France, whose coming had been so long hoped for.

Time had brought its sorrows to Ninon. It had treated many of the friends of earlier years with a hand less sparing than its touch on her. Among those passed away into the sleep of death, was Madame de Choisy. A great mutual affection had existed between the two women ever since they had first met, and the severance saddened Ninon. At Forges, she knew there would be many of her friends and acquaintance, old and new, and instead of going to spend the spring days at the Picpus

cottage, she yielded to the persuasions of Madame de Montausier and of Madame de la Fayette, and went to drink the waters, mingle in its comparatively mild dissipations, and join in the gay school for scandal for which Forges was as noted as are the run of hydropathic resorts. It lies some half-way between Paris and the coast by Dieppe. One of the three springs it contains is named after the queen, presumably the one which brought Louis the Dieudonné, and the other two are called respectively *La Royale* and *Le Cardinal.*

Something neglected now, the place was thronged in Ninon's day, every season with a motley crowd of varied nationalities and conditions of men and woman. "Parisians and provincials, nobles and citizen-folk, monks and nuns, English, Flemish, Spaniards, Christians — Catholics and Hugenots — Jews, Mohammedans, every one drinks in company the waters, whose detestable flavour brings your heart into your mouth. This debauch takes place at six o'clock a.m."

Then began a promenade in the avenue of the Capucin garden, thrown open to the public, and tongues, let loose, fell to work upon the passing events and topics and reputations and no reputations. At nine, breakfast drew the hungry ones to table, and Mass the devout. All the morning was spent in doing nothing, or the business of the toilette; then came a copious dinner, then visiting and more chatter.

At five began the theatre, supplied from the Rouen companies. At seven was supper, then

more promenading, concluding with litanies sung in the monks' chapel.

The Duchesse of Montpensier was among the company—her period of mourning just ended for her father, who had died at Blois in the preceding summer. The Grande Mademoiselle had been seized with the *cacoëthes scribendi*, and treated her circle with readings from her romances, *La Princesse de Paphlagonie*, *L'Ile Imaginaire*, and a series of *Portraits*, for which style of composition there was a rage just then. Ninon considered their excellence fell very short of Mademoiselle's martial talents. In a day or two arrived the Duc de Roquelaure, with his cousin the chevalier, a personage of terror-striking mien, followed everywhere by a Monsieur de Romainville, a gouty, objectionable individual, as, indeed, not much more could be said of his two friends. Instead of the waters, he drank such a quantity of cider, that it aggravated his malady to the extent of sending for one of the Capucin confessors; but on his appearance the chevalier flourished his sword at him. "Be off with you, my father!" he cried. "He has lived like a heathen: let him die like one"; and so violently did the invalid laugh at this sally, that it cured him.

One day the chevalier was hectoring over the number of the victims of his doughty sword-blade. "And I have," he added, "fought at least fifty duels, and never received a single wound."

"Parbleu! my dear cousin," calmly said the Duc de Roquelaure, "I have fought only one duel in all my life, and then I was killed."

The end of the dog-days closed the season of Forges, and then Ninon returned to rue des Tournelles.

The death of the dowager-queen, after her long illness and suffering, brought a temporary lull in the dissipations and rush of frivolity at the Court. Moreover, the breaking-out of the war with Spain, on account of Louis XIV.'s claim on Flanders in right of his wife, left the king no time for the usual Court routine. And then it was that he showed himself a king indeed, leading his troops to victory. In three weeks, with Condé—once again completely in favour, all his revolts no longer remembered—and Turenne, whom Louis told that it was his wish to learn from him the art of war, Franche Comté was conquered. It was the dawn of a brilliant series of victories, and of the glory and power of the France of Louis's earlier years.

And now came a strange wooing, begun undeniably on the part of the lady—no less a personage than the Grande Mademoiselle, now arrived at the discreet age of forty-two—when she fell in love with Monsieur de Lauzun, colonel of the just created first regiment of dragoons, one of the many distinctions conferred on him by Louis. Youngest son of a noble Gascon family—described by Bussy Rabutin as "one of the least men in mind as well as body that God ever created"—elsewhere he is pictured to us as one having a sort of talent, which, however, consisted in turning everything and everybody into ridicule, worming out their secrets, and playing upon their foibles.

He was noble in his carriage, and lived in splendid style. He loved high play, and played like a gentleman. His figure was very diminutive, and it is incomprehensible how he could ever become a favourite with the ladies; but that he was in a notable degree. The Duchesse de Montpensier conceived a passionate admiration for this little gentleman; she who had aspired to be queen of France, or empress of Germany, and had refused the crown of England, went *folle* for love of Antoninus de Caumont, Count de Lauzun.

This, however, was not the beginning of his career at Court, where he had been introduced by his relation, the Maréchal de Grammont. Small as Lauzun was, he bore himself splendidly; he had the grand air which Louis so greatly admired, and it helped to win him almost boundless consideration from the king. When the mastership of the Ordnance became vacant, Louis promised it to him; on condition, however, that for the present Lauzun should keep the matter a secret. This was seeking too much of his vanity and boastfulness, and the secret being one no longer, reached the ears of the minister Louvois, who at once went to the king, and with much good sense and grave reasoning over the unwisdom of such an appointment, persuaded His Majesty to withdraw his promise. Lauzun thereupon burst into the king's presence, wild with rage, hurled a storm of reproaches on him, and taking his own sword, he snapped it across his knee, vowing that he would never again serve a prince who broke his word in such shameful fashion.

"I should be sorry," said Louis, crossing with dignified steps to the open window, and throwing his cane out of it, "to have struck a man of rank"; but the next morning Lauzun was lodged in the Bastille. Only for a short time however. Louis, in a sense, had broken his word; but Lauzun, on his part, had violated conditions, and the young man was forgiven, and by way of indemnity was offered the captaincy of the Royal Guards, which he at first insolently refused, and only accepted under entreaty.

It was after his release from the Bastille that this most Gascon of Gascon gentlemen became the object of the Grande Mademoiselle's ardent admiration. At first it was he who coquetted, affecting not to understand, observing only the airs of profoundest respect, just touched with melancholy, and permitting himself a very occasional sigh. Then one day Mademoiselle murmured to the handsome dragoon captain—"I do not dare, in your presence, to utter the name of him I love; but I consent to writing it."

And the next night, during the performance of a ballet at the Louvre, she glided near to Lauzun, and slipped a paper into his hand. It bore only these words—"*It is you.*"

Then it was a very different affair. Who so ardent, and passionately in love as Lauzun? Carried away by his feelings, he broke into the bedchamber of Mademoiselle unannounced, and falling at her feet where she sat before a mirror, in the scantiest of *déshabillé*, eloquently gave way to

expressions of rapture, and the good fortune which had impelled him to seek her at such a delightful moment, when her charms lay revealed in all the fulness of their beauty. The Grande Mademoiselle was thin to scragginess—but *qu'importe ?*

She believed his protestations, loved Lauzun ever more and more, and passed her time in devising the way for obtaining the king's consent to their union.

Meanwhile the king's conduct, in publicly taking about with him his two mistresses, was beginning to create such gross scandal, that it called down forcible rebuke from the pulpits. In regard to la Montespan, while her husband must have been dense indeed not to be aware of the true state of the case, he was allowed to be credited with the ignorance of it. Among the preachers most severe in their rebuke, was the Père Bourdaloue, the eloquent Jesuit. He spared no word in endeavouring to bring Louis to some sense of decent living, and it was not without effect—before all, on Louise de la Vallière, whose weeping was audible from where she sat in a dark corner of the Jesuit church of St Louis.

Ninon, whose orthodoxy was not rigid, and had found herself only too often sufficiently well justified in the small faith she placed in the religious professions coming within her experience, determined on the bold amusement of testing the sincerity of Bourdaloue. She pretended to be seriously ill, and sent to him to visit her, in, of course, his spiritual capacity. Dressed in the most becoming of invalid *négligés*, she received the priest with all her

winning smiles and words and fascinating glances. They were absolutely ineffective. Bourdaloue having completed his exhortations and pious counsels, rose to take his leave, observing, as he departed, that he perceived the malady afflicting Ninon was not of the body, but of the spirit, and that he would beseech the great Healer of souls to cure her.

The tale of this interview got wind, and brought down some satirical verses on Ninon's defeat—which she frankly acknowledged, not even without considerable content; for it taught her that the religious profession was not one vast fraud, but that the Church might have many true shepherds of its fold, cumbered as it might be with the false and venal.

Among these last she had signalised Monseigneur d'Autun, apparently with reason enough. He was a mild-mannered, smiling prelate, with a paternal, beneficent air, one who had several times changed sides in the days of the Fronde. Ninon had first met him at that time at the house of Madame de Longueville, and thenceforward he was one of the circle of rue des Tournelles. Frequently he had begged or borrowed, "for the poor," considerable sums of money from his open-handed hostess; but Ninon entertained doubts of the bishop's saintliness, and one day they were set at rest beyond all question by the conclusions he drew from certain arguments he had propounded to her. Then throwing off the mask of the virtuous living he professed, he boldly declared his passionate admiration for her. That a man of the world would have

been repulsed by Ninon is not very probable; but she felt the instinctive aversion for the touch of some insidious, poisonous reptile, and she shrank from him, and ordered him from her presence; and departing, Monseigneur d'Autun looked the vengeance his muttered words threatened.

In discussing with Molière her experiences of more than one distinguished prelate, Richelieu and Mazarin not forgotten, she asked him how it was possible to discern the true from the false?

Molière replied that there was nothing more easy, and with Ninon's permission to introduce her latest clerical admirer, he would put the answer to her question before her in less than six weeks. He had her joyous consent, and the answer within the given time. It was *Le Tartufe.*

Molière's recent plays had raised him to the height of his fame. He suffered from the usual gnat-bites and little stings of jealousy inseparable from literary success. The critics did their spite-fullest. The critics, said Molière, were like the children who can whip horses, but cannot drive them.

Molière's life, apart from its work, was more than incomplete; it was a cruel one. The wife he had chosen, Madeleine Béjârt, the daughter of an actress of his company, was a silly, ignorant little coquette, in no way worthy of him, and constantly giving him cause for jealousy.

On the production of *Tartufe*, the plaudits rang again and again from floor to ceiling. *Veluti in speculum.* The cap fitted many heads so admirably,

so entirely, that the comedy created the author a host of enemies among the bigots and the hypocrites whom his satire so vigorously lashed. Orgon, who has seen at church a young man who conducts himself with such a devout air that he believes in its genuineness, and receives him into his own family, which he neglects in his great admiration for Tartufe. He is on the point even of proposing to give him his daughter in marriage, when, hidden under a table, concealed by a deep, trailing tablecloth, he overhears his protégé's declaration of passion for Elmire, his own wife. "*Mais, madame, après tout, je ne suis pas un ange*," says Tartufe. The scene is inimitable, with its crowning picture of Orgon's face of mingled rage and smiling satisfaction, peering up from the folds of the tablecloth at the discomfited scoundrel, whom he forthwith turns out of the house. Tartufe's endeavour to circumvent Orgon only brings condign punishment on the impostor, who is sent to expiate his misdeeds in prison. Shallow pretence and profession of piety, shibboleths the world has always with it; and the truth of the picture struck home with such a shock, that the piece ran in perilous risk of being condemned. The king, however, commanded a representation of it at Versailles. "*Le roi le veut*, and unfading laurels crown *Tartufe*."

Louis was delighted with this comedy; although it had been Mazarin's deplorable policy to leave his higher intelligence and taste so little cultivated, these were naturally capable of appreciating the wit and humour of Molière's work, and it formed a shield

of protection against the dramatist's many bitter enemies. The king gave him a pension from his own private purse, and Molière was an honoured guest at his table. The money accruing from his own labour, alone brought competence. He had a country house at Auteuil, where he entertained many distinguished persons, and found a little rest from the arduous demands of his profession. The Prince de Condé also took great delight in his society. Many a munificent act to youthful or struggling efforts of genius the popular and admired dramatist and comedian performed in secret, and ever without ostentation. Perhaps but for him Racine would never have been heard of. The poet was nineteen when Molière encouraged him to carry through his *Théagène et Chariclée*, a piece too weak for stage production, but for which Molière made him a present of a hundred louis, and further gave him the scenario for *Les Frères Ennemis*.

The actor Baron was another star in the dramatic firmament owing its brilliancy to Molière. Baron, like Garrick, excelled in both tragedy and comedy; and Molière loved him as if he had been his own son. One day Baron pleaded with him for a poor country actor, who wanted enough money to take him to rejoin his troupe. He was an old fellow-comedian of Molière's; his name was Mondorge. "How much does he require?" asked Molière. Baron thought four pistoles would meet the case. "Give him four pistoles from me then," said Molière, "and here are twenty besides, which you can say are from you." To this he added a hand-

some suit of clothes; and in such ways shone the worth of the actor-dramatist in a naughty world.

It was Molière who exclaimed—"*Où la vertu, va-t'-elle se nicher?*" one day, when he gave alms to some poor creature, and the man, finding it to be a louis d'or, thought that it had been given in mistake, and ran after him to give it back.

The Duchesse de Montpensier, who had inherited the palace of the Luxembourg from her father, was now spending some months in it, chiefly occupied in endeavouring to bring the king to consent to her marriage with Monsieur de Lauzun. She invited Ninon to go and stay with her, and in all good faith, and unsuspicious of any special significance attaching to the visit, Ninon went; and as far as Mademoiselle was concerned, no treachery was intended. Nevertheless, the duchesse had been drawn into a deep-laid scheme for humbling Ninon to the dust, by trying to make her the means of bringing her to draw her own daughter into the ways of life which she herself had followed, but from which, more and more as time passed, the sense of its evil revolted her. Sixteen years had flown since she had lost sight of the child; after making but a half-hearted endeavour to find it. The whirl of gaiety and excitement in which she was then living, had quickly dragged her back into its vortex; but Madame de Fiesque, though she had affected ignorance, knew where the young girl was, and artfully cultivating herself into the graces of La Grande Mademoiselle, she had now contrived to introduce her into the palace, in the guise of

a young female dependant, of whom she made a sort of humble companion or waiting-maid. The girl was evidently as unhappy as she certainly was very beautiful; and Ninon, interested and touched with pity for her, entered into conversation with her, which elicited the fact that she had a lover—one, however, so far above her in station, that any honourable alliance was not to be dreamed of, for all the young girl's heart was pure, and young Monsieur de Perceval was no profligate. Finding that it was intended, or rather said to be intended, that a marriage was to be effected between Clotilde and one of the palace cooks, Ninon took her under her protection and shelter to the rue des Tournelles. This was precisely falling in with the designs of Madame de Fiesque, whose idea was that Ninon would lead Clotilde, ignorant of who she was, into the free courses of living she herself had followed, and indeed still followed; but herein lay the mistake of Madame de Fiesque. Little by little, suspicion that Clotilde was no other than her own daughter grew to certainty; and that the girl should be exposed to, or made the victim of, the many miseries and evils underlying the glitter of her own career, was the one thing the bitterly-repenting mother determined should never be. And she devised a counterplot, which she confided to the Duchesse de Montpensier, who warmly lent her countenance to its carrying out. Monsieur de Perceval was a relative of Madame de Montausier, whose sincere friendship for Ninon, her sympathy with her in the distress of mind she was suffering,

and lastly, and perhaps not least, the splendid *dot* of the Loches estate, worth 300,000 livres, which Ninon was prepared to bestow on Clotilde, smoothed the way to the marriage of the two lovers. They were wedded quietly, and then travelled abroad for two years; so that the plotters found no chance of interfering with their happiness. As to who Clotilde really was, those interested were content with the supposition that she was some connexion of an illustrious family, about whom it was nobody's affair to inquire more nearly. From time to time in after years Ninon saw Clotilde again, but she put a strong curb on her natural feelings, and never disclosed her identity.

CHAPTER XVIII

A Disastrous Wooing—Fénelon—"Mademoiselle de L'Enclos"—The Pride that had a Fall—The Death of the Duchesse d'Orléans—Intrigue—The Sun-King and the Shadows—The Clermont Scholar's Crime—Monsieur de Montespan—Tardy Indignation—The Encounter—The *Filles Répenties*—What the Cards Foretold.

THE episode of Clotilde could but forcibly remind Ninon of the son whom his father, Monsieur de Gersay, had taken away so shortly after his birth, to rear as his own exclusively, but of whom, unlike Clotilde, she had not entirely lost traces. On the contrary, she knew that the Marquis de Gersay lived the most of his time on his own estates in Brittany, and that therefore Charles, as the child had been named, was likely to be with him; and Ninon wrote to the marquis, begging for some intelligence of the young man—for he was now two-and-twenty. De Gersay informed her that he had taken the necessary steps for legitimatising him, and that he was called the Chevalier de Villiers. He added that the secret of his birth was entirely unknown to the young man, who was a fine, handsome fellow, and very amiable and intelligent, only needing to rub off the little corners of his provincial rearing to be perfection. The marquis added that it would please him very well to bring him to Paris and introduce him into the circle of Ninon's friends, so famous for its refinement and elegance; but it

was on the condition that the origin of his birth should be religiously concealed.

And when young de Villiers arrived in Paris, Ninon received him in her salon, as she received other young people who sought entry there, or for whom it was sought, that they might acquire the tone of good society and *le bon goût*. Ninon was then over sixty years of age. Whether, as it is said, she absolutely retained all the beauty and freshness of her youth, may perhaps be taken *cum grano salis*; but that much of it clung about her with all the charm of her manner, seems indisputable, since she fascinated the young man of twenty-two.

He fell passionately in love with her; but for a long time he maintained silence, until he could conceal his love no longer, and Ninon could no longer remain blind to the true state of the case. She was deeply distressed and perplexed. She assumed a sort of maternal tenderness towards him, which had simply the effect of heating the young man's ardour to frenzy, and she was forced to forbid him her house. Fear of never seeing her again, drove him to say that he would cease to love her. Love forced him to do this, and to this promise love made him false. The excess of his passion would not permit him to exist longer in a state of doubt. He sought a last interview of her. Ninon had gone to her country-house, and thither he followed. He found her alone, and spoke like a man driven, as indeed he was, to desperation. Ninon, overcome with pity, overwhelmed with grief at being the cause of her son's misery, could no longer maintain her

firmness, and young de Villiers, believing that the moment of his happiness had arrived, approached her with passionate gestures. Seized with horror, she shrank from him and told him the truth. "I am your mother!" she cried in her distress. One instant de Villiers stood as if thunderstruck; then he turned and rushed into the garden, hurrying blindly on till he reached the little thicket at the end of it. There, in his despair, he drew his sword and stabbed himself to the death.

Ninon waited, and when he did not return, she went in search of him, to find him weltering in his own blood. He was still breathing, and strove to speak; but his words were undistinguishable. The passionate love he felt for her still burned in his eyes; but the agitation her tenderness and despair occasioned him, only hastened the end, and he died in her arms.

The horror of this tragedy nearly drove Ninon to take away her own life. Her pitying friends strove to bring some assuagement to her sufferings, and Madame Scarron nursed her in the long illness which ensued, and her gentle, tender ways and words, and her manner of winning Ninon to speak of the unhappy lost one, at last brought tears to her eyes, parched with her mental agony, and so relief came, and Françoise Scarron, weeping with her, was then her best friend. It was she who ordered a mausoleum tomb for the dead. It was placed where Charles de Villiers had been interred, a monument of black marble. Night and day the tapers burned around it, and

many an hour in prayer Ninon knelt beside the last resting-place of Charles de Villiers.

At this time, Madame Scarron, hitherto very far from a devotee, introduced to her a young priest of St Sulpice. His name was de la Mothe Fénelon. His touching words and sincere, gentle sympathy brought healing as time passed; but the shadow of sorrow and suffering never fully lifted —the gay, frivolous Ninon was known no more. Henceforth, till death, she was Mademoiselle de L'Enclos, bearing herself with dignity, self-restrained, and esteemed by most.

The consent of the king to the marriage of Lauzun and the Grande Mademoiselle having been at last wrung from him, Lauzun grew insufferable. His pride was boundless. Except to the king, he would not even doff his hat. He occupied himself exclusively in arranging the details of the festivities and ceremonial of the marriage.

But his enemies were at work. His folly and vanity had created a host of them, and among them were the powerful Louvois, and the vindictive and ambitious favourite, Madame de Montespan, whom he had frequently grossly insulted; while Louvois found himself constantly thwarted and provoked by him. Madame de Montespan, thinking over the matter of Mademoiselle's marriage, decided that her vast property would be much better disposed among the eight children she had brought the king, than in the pockets of Lauzun, and finding a supporter in Louvois, she represented the case to His Majesty, the result being that he

withdrew his consent to the marriage, and de Lauzun was lodged in the Bastille, his character blackened—no such difficult matter—by the two. The friends of the lovers had warned them of the imminent possibility of this; and it was believed that they accepted the advice, and contrived to be privately married. De Lauzun vented his wrath for the promise—this time so undisputedly broken—by denouncing Madame de Montespan for her wifely unfaithfulness to her husband; but it did not hinder his imprisonment, which he spent for five years in the fortress of Pignerol, that dreary stronghold of deportation for offending, blue-blooded courtiers. He was conducted thither by Monsieur d'Artagnan, lieutenant of the Guards. Five years' further incarceration after this in Pignerol was allotted him; though on conditions slightly ameliorated. The treatment had first been hard in the extreme, and had rigidly condemned him to one cell.

Sympathy extended only to the disconsolate Mademoiselle, the victim of an ambitious coxcomb, and of a venal, faithless woman.

Attention was, however, soon turned entirely from this affair, by the terrible and sudden death of Henrietta, the Duchesse d'Orléans of England—daughter of King Charles I.—the amiable and universally beloved wife of the king's brother, the Duc d'Orléans.

She was one evening enjoying the cool air on the great balcony of the palace of St Cloud, in company with her ladies, and requested one of them to fetch her a glass of chicory water from her

apothecary. The apothecary arrived in a few moments with an enamelled goblet containing the drink, which he presented to her. Scarcely had she drunk it, than she was seized with violent convulsive agony, and cried out that she was poisoned.

They carried her to the nearest bedchamber, and laying her down, loosened her clothes, and administered all the usual restoratives; but in vain. Already her face and limbs were livid and distorted. "I am poisoned—I have drunk poison!" was all she was able to utter.

The king came hurrying to the bedside, followed by his physicians, whom he had hastily summoned. They examined the agonised woman, grew themselves pale with dismay, and remained silent.

"Where are your senses?" demanded the king, in an access of distressful alarm. "It is frightful to let a woman die like this, and not be able to afford any help."

The doctors only looked at each other, and still did not utter a word.

Madame herself entreated for an emetic, but Monsieur Valet, physician-in-chief, declared that it would be dangerous. She had been seized, he said, with the *miserere*—the term generally then used for cholera morbus.

Against these silent impotent healers of the body, the physician of the soul was sent for. He came. It was Monsieur l'Abbé Bossuet, and amid his pious, gentle consolations Madame passed away. It was also Bossuet who pronounced the funeral oration a day or two later.

"Madame is dead!—Madame is dead!" So the terrible words rang forth in the presence of the king and the assembled half-stunned courtiers.

That Madame was universally beloved had an exception to its ruling. He who should have best loved her, the duke himself, was indifferent to her. Scandal, busy with his name, said worse—said so much that was shameful, that it is not to be repeated here. It said so much, that the king, who was aware of it, had already ordered the immediate departure of the chevalier de Lorraine from Paris, a dismissal that was to be final. This minion of the duke had been furious at the command, and accused Madame as the cause of it, and she had simply laughed at the accusation. The day following her death, the chevalier de Lorraine, it was asserted, was seen, wrapped in a long riding-cloak, and his face concealed by a hat whose broad brims were drawn down low over his brows, riding hastily by the path of the gate of St Cloud, and so by the roads to the frontier. He was known to be a great friend of Monsieur de Luxembourg, and at a later day more than suspicion implicated Monsieur de Luxembourg in the most notorious poison *cause celèbre* of its century.

The Court of Louis XIV. was now one vast spider's-web of intrigue, woven from the lust and greed of so many of those surrounding him. It was the Nemesis of his policy of drawing all the nobility and provincial seigneurs from far and near to Versailles. If these were not lured into the brilliance of the Sun-King's presence, and desired

to live on their estates, it was next to an impossibility to do so, under fear of being suspected of plotting against the throne. They were required to group themselves all round the great orb, gathering from it the lustre beyond which all was obscurity, and this rarely enough to be done, even in Paris, but only at Versailles. Louis did not love the Louvre. He had never forgotten that in the days of the Fronde he had been driven thence to find refuge where it could be had.

And so the castles and lands of fair France were left untenanted and falling to ruin, and to lie untilled and neglected, for all the good at least the people reaped; and this at a time when rougher warfare had ceased, and religious strife had calmed down, and under other ruling, the promise of prosperity dawned. Such profits and incomings as did arise from these tenures and estates, by the toil of the peasant dwellers on them, brought them only starvation wage; for the money earned by the sweat of the brows of the peasantry was needed for its overlords' silks and velvets, and laces and jewelled snuff-boxes, and solitaires, to add greater bedazzlement to the salons and galleries where Louis le Grand lived his span of years. And even when this was ended—the time was still yet afar off for the breaking of the storm—but on, ever faster and heavier, the clouds were lowering in. Neither Richelieu or Mazarin tolerated the spirit which inspires to a man ruling, or striving to rule, with prudence and protecting care in his own house. They feared it, and taxation and gabelle, and rents

and quit-rents, as they waxed on to their hideous proportions, set minds working on the problem of why such things should be, and how came about such "inequality among men." "Where is the wonder, is it not my college?" said the king, one day when he had bestowed his magnificent presence on the representation, by the pupils of the Jesuit College at Clermont, of a tragedy very finely performed. "*Collegium Cleromonterum Societate Jesus*" was originally graven upon the college gate, and the sycophant principal had now caused this to be effaced, and "*Collegium Ludovici Magni*" inscribed in gold letters in its place.

The next morning was to be seen, fastened on the gate beneath, a Latin distich, whose meaning may be thus interpreted—

"Christ's name expunged, the king's now fills the stone;
Oh, impious race! by that is plainly shown
That Louis is the only god you own!"

The author of these lines was run to earth. He was found to be a pupil of the college, and thirty-one years of the Bastille and of St Marguérite were awarded his crime. The term might have ended only with his years, had he not suddenly become sole heir to the estates of his family, and it was then suggested by the governor of the Bastille, a Jesuit, that setting him free might bring golden rewards. Being released, probably the reward followed.

And ever the intricate machinery of corruption and intrigue in high places worked on. Among other schemes of Madame de Montespan, was one of

marrying Louise de la Vallière to the Duc de Lauzun. It would be, at all events, removing the two incommoding ones from her path; but it was an arrangement not very likely to appeal to the Duchesse de la Vallière, and moreover, the imprisoned Duc de Lauzun had not been consulted. The great idea of the favourite was simply, by fair means or foul, to get all she could of Mademoiselle's possessions, and knowing Mademoiselle's infatuation for Lauzun, she set the strings to the best of her power to tempt her to part with an immense portion of her fortune by the promise of trying to win the king's consent to freeing the captive of Pignerol. To this end she flattered and cajoled Mademoiselle's ladies, among whom was Madame de Fiesque, Ninon's bitter enemy, none the less envenomed against her on account of the triumphant carrying through of the marriage of Clotilde. And as it happened one evening, Ninon, departing from her usual custom of remaining indoors when she visited Madame Montausier at St Cloud, went for a stroll in the gardens, and at a turn of the clipped hedges she came face to face with la Montespan, leaning on the arm of Madame de Fiesque.

Then came the bursting of the thunderclap. Madame de Fiesque, pallid with rage, whispered a word in the ear of la Montespan, who turned, and in a tone of disdain indescribable, said—

"La Ninon! Who dares to permit this woman to walk here?"

"This woman!" The words stunned Ninon for the moment; while indignation raged up into

her heart, and angry tears blinded her. Ninon was —no matter what she was, she had elected to follow her own ways. These, at all events, were not soiled with the iniquities of the woman before her. She had not been false to marriage-vows. She had never betrayed trusts reposed in her and in friendship. She had not craftily stolen the love of the king from the woman he professed to be attached to. Blazing with indignation at the Montespan's insulting words and insolent stare, she made some excuse to Madame Montausier for returning home, and sent a message to Monsieur de Montespan to call on her in the morning. On his arrival, she taxed him with the knowledge of his wife's infidelity, and when he strove to disavow it, she drove the nail home, until he had no choice but to fall in with her suggestions—that he should find his way straight to St Cloud and punish the royal favourite in the presence of the king and all the Court. And this he did, bestowing a sounding box on the lovely ear of his wife. And when Ninon asked what the king said, the reply was, "Never a word." But many a word, or rather epithet, de Montespan bestowed then on his Athénais.

Ninon recounted this affair with great gusto to Madame Scarron. Françoise still kept up great intimacy with her friend, Madame Arnoul, a person for whom Mademoiselle de L'Enclos had an instinctive dislike. She was a great fortune-teller with the cards, and an arch-crafty intriguer, and by a series of manœuvres she wormed herself into the notice of Madame de Montespan, whose husband subsequently

played a sorry part in the scandal occurring at St Cloud; since he permitted himself to be bribed to continue to countenance his wife's connexion with the king.

Madame Arnoul however, was laying her scheme, and played her cards so well for the amusement of Madame de Montespan, that she managed to acquaint herself with many secrets of the royal favourite; and in return, in order to do evil to gain what she considered good, she whispered to Madame de Montespan the truth about de Montespan's box on the ear. The result was an order for Ninon's conveyance to the convent-home for the *Filles Répenties*; and the guard who arrested her allowed her just twenty minutes for her preparations for leaving the rue des Tournelles.

It was a terrible and humiliating blow for Ninon. All the consolations and representations of Madame Arnoul, who was permitted an interview with her, could not reconcile her. Yet they brought some comfort; for Ninon could see that the woman's machinations promised to bring about the fall of the favourite, and in her place to set no less, no greater, a person than Françoise, the Widow Scarron.

Rome was not, of course, built in a day; and Madame Arnoul, not forgetful of her own interests, hastened slowly. Indications were not wanting that the influence of Madame de Montespan was waning.

The favourite's temper was not a mild one, and sometimes she gave vent to it in rather startling fashion. Madame Arnoul's first care was to lead Madame Scarron into more devout ways than hitherto she had followed, and the habitual calm,

composed bearing of Françoise was not out of the picture of this new *rôle*. Madame Arnoul, in her card-telling visits to Madame de Montespan, was favoured by her with many confidences, and among them the *Mâitresse en Titre* mentioned that she was seeking a governess for her children, a lady who was to be pious and amiable, and of course accomplished, and intellectually gifted, and rich in patience. Except for the piety, Madame Scarron possessed all these qualifications, and for the piety, it would come in time; and meanwhile it could be put on easily enough—it was a virtue not difficult to assume. And Madame Arnoul, consulting her cards, gravely informed Madame de Montespan that if she repaired to the church of St Sulpice, on a certain day, at a certain hour, she would see among the communicants of the early Mass, the very person she was seeking for her children's education. Then followed a description of the comely, if no longer very youthful, Françoise d'Aubigné, who was instructed to put in the necessary appearance at St Sulpice. So the arrangement was brought about and concluded very satisfactorily, and Madame Scarron found herself in charge of the little Duc du Maine, and Louis XIV.'s other children, of whom Athénais de Montespan was the mother, and more and more as time passed, winning the admiration and liking of the king, who found great charm in her conversation, which certainly went to show that his faulty education and rearing had not totally stunted him mentally, for the wife of Scarron, by nature and long association, was a woman of no common attainments.

CHAPTER XIX

"In Durance Vile"—Molière's *Mot—Le Malade Imaginaire*—"Rogues and Vagabonds"—The passing of Molière—The narrowing Circle—Fontenelle—Lulli—Racine—The little Marquis—A tardy Pardon—The charming Widow Scarron—A Journey to the Vosges, and the Haunted Chamber.

"One story is good till another is told." The tangle of petty vanities, lust of gold and mutual jealousies disgracing the Court of Versailles at this time, might well have dragged Ninon de L'Enclos into the hated durance of *Les Filles Répenties*, at the instigation of the woman who at least was not the one to cast a stone. One fact alone was indisputable: that there she was, and as certainly more than one powerful friend at Court was sparing no endeavour to obtain her release. Among these was Molière, the man of the generous, kindly heart, who was not likely to forget the many bounteous acts and the warm sympathy Ninon had extended to him throughout his career.

And to him it mainly was that she owed her release from the convent. A representation by Molière and his company had been given at Versailles of his new play, *Le Malade Imaginaire*, and the king, on its conclusion, had sent for Molière in some anxiety; for it had been evident to him that the actor was himself no imaginary invalid, but suffering and exhausted with the exertion of his arduous *rôle* of Argan. More than once of late his understudy,

Croisy, had been required to take his place; and the king expressed his sympathy and his regret that Molière should have over-fatigued himself to afford him gratification, for that his health was too precious to be trifled with.

Molière replied that he would have striven to leave his very deathbed to plead the cause he sought to win of His Majesty; and then he went on to tell of Ninon's captivity, of which the king appeared to be ignorant. "It is, moreover, very absurd, Sire," added Molière, "for I assure your Majesty, that Ninon is neither *fille* nor *répentie*."

The king laughed at this view of the case, as did his minister Colbert, who was seated near, and Molière, not losing sight of the royal proclivity of promise-breaking, wasted not a moment in causing the order vouchsafed for Ninon's release, to be delivered in to the Superior of the *Répenties*. Then a coach was sent for, the gates were opened, and Ninon was free.

Full of gratitude for the favour which she had not so much as sought of Molière, she hastened to his house. He was seated wearily in a chair, but for the moment, in her joyful excitement, she did not notice his appearance, more especially as he sprang up briskly to meet her and to take her in his arms, while her tears fell fast, assuring her that she had done him a world of good. Before she came in he owned that he had been feeling unusually ill, and was about to ask Croisy to take his place on the stage that evening; but now— "No, I will play myself," added Molière, and his pale

cheeks flushed, and his eyes gathered their wonted brightness and animation. "I will be *Le Malade Imaginaire* once more!"

Alas! once more. And a little while before the curtain fell for the last time on the closing interlude, the word "*juro*," several times reiterated through the dialogue, came faintly on a stream of blood from his lips, and the dying Molière was borne from the stage.

It was but the fulfilment of the apprehensions of his friends. His lungs had been for some time affected, and he had broken a blood-vessel. Already half-unconscious, they conveyed him homeward to his house in the rue de Richelieu; but he fainted on the way, and he was carried into the convent of St Vincent de Paul and laid on a couch in the parlour, where, in sore distress, the good sisters tended him, for he had frequently shown them much hospitality and generous kindness, and in the arms of the two supporting him he passed away. His half-inaudible dying request was for religious consolation; but ere that came he was dead. The priest of St Eustache did not hurry to attend a stage-player—the "rogue and vagabond"—for what else in the sight of the law was this fine literary genius, great philosopher and noble-hearted man? Neither was it the fault of Monseigneur Harlay de Champvalon, Archbishop of Paris ("so notorious," writes the poet's great biographer, "for his gallant intrigues") that he was not denied Christian burial.

Molière's young wife had not been a pattern of conjugal propriety; but she revered her husband; and

in her indignation at the archbishop's refusal, she cried—"They refuse to bury a man to whom in Greece, altars would have been erected!" and asking the Curé of Auteuil, whose views differed from the archiepiscopal ones, to accompany her to Versailles, she found her way into the king's presence and demanded justice. "If my husband was a criminal, his crimes were sanctioned by your Majesty in person," she said. Louis's response was elusive, as it was apt to be in the face of difficult questions. It was, he said, an affair of the archbishop's; but he sent secret commands to Monseigneur, which resulted in a compromise, and the body of the dead poet was interred in the cemetery of St Joseph, rue Montmartre, accompanied by two priests. But it was not first admitted into the church, for he had died, as Monseigneur said, "without the consolations of religion."

"*A ministering angel shall my sister be when thou liest howling.*" Irresistibly the words of that other great dramatic genius force themselves into the record of Molière's laying to his long rest. It was still only to be secured amid the riot of a rabble which, having got wind of the dispute in high places, assembled outside the house in the rue de Richelieu. The disgraceful uproar was quelled only by Madame Molière throwing money, to a large amount, out of window. Then the mob silenced down, and followed the simple cortège respectfully.

The widow of Molière subsequently married again; but his memory must have remained warm in her heart; for some years later, during a bitter cold

winter, she had a hundred loads of wood conveyed to the cemetery, and burned on the tomb of her husband, to warm all the poor people of the quarter. "The great heat split in two the stone, which was still to be seen cracked across the middle in the early part of the eighteenth century."[1] The Fontaine Molière, in the rue de Richelieu, now commemorates the poet, and in the green-room of the Comédie Française are the bust, and the portrait, by the painter Coypel, of him who was practically the founder of the world-famous institution. There were countless epitaphs on Molière, generated for the most part, by the injustices done him in life as in death. The following is accounted the most noteworthy:—

"Tu réformas et la ville et la cour;
Mais quelle en fut la rècompense?
Les Français rougiront un jour
De leur peu de reconnaissance,
Il leur fallut un comédien
Qui mit à les polir, sa gloire et son étude.
Mais Molière, a ta gloire il ne manquerait rien,
Si, parmi les défauts que tu peignis si bien,
Tu les avais repris de leur ingratitude."

P. BONHOURS.

And so the journey of her life, shadowed more and more by the dropping away into the mists of death of so many of the well-loved ones, Ninon's own years fled on, still finding content in the society of the many friends, young and old, not gone before. Among these was Madame de la Sablière,

[1] Du Tillet.

with la Fontaine ever in attendance; Marsillac, the comrade of Ninon's youth—now the duc de la Rochefoucauld—with his *Maxims*, which she keenly criticised, as based on the philosophy of self-love: that self only was the motive power of human thought and action; Corneille, growing old, and preferring his latest tragedy of *Surène* to the immortal *Cid*, a preference shared by few; with him came his nephew, Fontenelle, the brilliant scholar and centenarian to be, short of a few weeks, who on his deathbed said—"My friends, I do not suffer; only I find existence a little difficult," and who followed the *viâ media* philosophy so closely, that he was wont to boast he never either laughed or wept. Then Ninon would tune her lute, and play the airs of the new musical conductor of the king's orchestra, Lulli, the miller's son, a scullion once, risen to be master of French dramatic music, who met his death so disastrously from the bungling treatment of a quack doctor. The priest who attended his last hours refused to give him the consolations of religion until he had consented to have the score of his latest opera destroyed. He consented, to the indignation of a friend who was with him. "Hush, hush!" said Lulli; "there is a fair copy of it in my drawer."

Sometimes Racine, a neighbour now of Mademoiselle de L'Enclos, would declaim passages from his *Iphigénie*, or Madame de la Fayette would read from her history of Henrietta of England, just then on point of completion. She and Madame Montausier were Ninon's sincerest and best-beloved

friends. One day Madame de la Fayette asked her the cause of the coolness existing between herself and Madame de Sévigné. It was a coolness all on one side, shrugged Ninon. To be sure, she had the young Marquis de Grignan, Madame's grandson, at her feet—as in times gone by, the Marquis *père*, and the Marquis *grandpère* had sighed there. She inclined, however, to his marrying as his mother desired, all the more that, besides entertaining no overwhelming admiration for the little marquis, she was jealous of his worshipping also at the shrine of the great tragic actress, la Champmeslè, who had rendered herself so famous in the *Andromaque* of Racine. The poet had introduced de Sévigné to the *tragédienne*, to whom Ninon conceded talent, but no beauty. The affair came to an amiable conclusion, and while a reconciliation was effected between Ninon and la Champmeslè, she concluded a peace with Madame de Sévigné, esteeming her friendship above the folly and trifling of her grandson.

To effect this treaty of peace, she was conducted to the house of Madame de Sévigné by their mutual friend, Madame de la Fayette. The physical personal attraction of the queen of epistolary correspondence has been many times recorded; but the critical Mademoiselle de L'Enclos does not allow her any great claims to it. Her nose was long and sharp, with wide nostrils, and her countenance generally had something of a pedantic stamp. Still, Ninon's opinion, while Madame de Sévigné's portrait of her by Mignard exists at Les Rochers, needs not to be accepted as final, and she hastens

to speak of her manner, at once so dignified and courteous. She went so far, in discussing Ninon's *liaison* with young de Sévigné, as to say that her objection was mainly rooted in the fear that her son's attachment to her would endure and hinder his desire for marriage, for which Madame de Sévigné herself was so anxious. As things went, de Sévigné soon after took to himself a wife, and Ninon gained a friend, who became a frequent guest at the *réunions* of the rue des Tournelles.

Profiting by Madame Scarron's favour at Court, Ninon sought to obtain the king's pardon for her old friend, St Evrémond; this was accorded. St Evrémond, however, did not return to France. He found the land of his exile a pleasant Patmos, and the Court of Whitehall, where he had won troops of friends, more congenial than Versailles, and he never crossed the Channel again, but lived his span of life, lengthy as Ninon's; and his resting-place is among the great in Westminster Abbey.

"Carolus de Saint Denis, Duc de St Evrémond.
Viro Clarissimo
Inter Præstantiores
Aloi Sui Scriptores
Semper Memorando
Amici Marantes.
P.P."

The golden link of their correspondence henceforth was alone to hold together the names of Ninon de L'Enclos and Henri de St Evrémond.

Madame Arnoul was regarded by Ninon with scant favour. She held her for a sort of *âme*

damnée of Madame Scarron, an adventuress, who played her cards well, so skilfully indeed, that her prognostications seemed more and more surely finding realisation. The Montespan's temper did not improve with time, and the placid demeanour of the royal governess was a great attraction to Louis, who would come oftener, and stay longer in his visits to the children. Moreover, he found great charm in her conversation. Ninon, who could not remain blind to these indications, and was ready to go great lengths to bring about de Montespan's disgrace, disliking Madame Arnoul as she did, was not above lending herself to forward any scheme to that end, even though it originated in Madame Arnoul's fertile brain; and one sufficiently daring did presently find birth there. For the service she had rendered Ninon conjointly with Molière, in freeing her from the durance of the *Répenties*, Madame Arnoul had claimed of her a *quid pro quo* at some future time. That time, she said, when she called upon her some few weeks later, was now, for putting the finishing strokes to the downfall of the favourite—if that de Montespan could still be designated—and Ninon was to be the instrument for this. She was, in the first place, to disguise herself as a man. So far, nothing easier, said Ninon—was it not to do what she had done so many a time?—and that small matter arranged, she and Madame Arnoul set out for the frontiers, where the king was about to go with all his Court to meet Turenne, who had been waging victorious war against the combined forces of Spain and

Austria, waxing ever more alarmed at, and jealous of, the successes of Louis XIV.

Arrived in Lorraine, the two ladies travelled to Nancy, reaching the town a day or so before the royal cortège arrived, Madame Arnoul having acquired the knowledge of the exact route it was to take. From Nancy, the two women proceeded to Luneville, and thence onward into Alsace, and far into the very heart of the Vosges, where they slept on the first night, in a little hamlet called Raon l'Étape. The next day they reached St Dié, a pretty little town, one day, said the terrible tradition, to be crushed by the falling of the huge precipice of l'Ormont; and to avert this catastrophe annual processions were made; but l'Ormont stands somewhat back from the area of St Dié, and if it fell, it would probably be short of the town. Moreover, what is St Dié but the gift of God?—*Dieu-donné* hedged about by the memory of its founder, the assassinated Childéric II.

Faring on by narrow, half-impassable roads, winding on the verge of rugged precipices, through dense pine-forests, whose close network of branches almost hid the sky, they reached St Marie-aux-Mines, a town forming part of the appanage of the Prince Palatine of Birkenfeld. It lies cradled between two pine-clad mountains, watered by innumerable limpid rivulets, meandering in all directions. There Ninon and Madame Arnoul halted for dinner, whose excellence was much below par of the natural attractions of the place; but Madame Arnoul consoled her companion

with the information that some few leagues more would bring them to their journey's end, and the place where the mysterious proceedings indicated were to be carried out. And next day they arrived in the neighbourhood of Ribeauvillé, and Ninon found herself in a magnificent château belonging to the brother-in-law of the Prince Palatine. This personage was, however, absent, and in his place the two ladies were received by the high steward, who, Madame Arnoul afterwards explained, was the cousin of the king's *valet-de-chambre*, whom she had enlisted into her project, and she handed the steward a letter from this relative.

Having perused the letter, he redoubled his courtesies; but evidently under the influence of extreme perturbation, which he strove to cover by silence. The letter he thrust into his pocket without any reference to its contents; unless a slight shrug of his shoulders meant anything.

At supper, of which he did the honours, Madame Arnoul asked him why he had not spoken of the famous Chamber of Phantoms the château contained. The steward started like a guilty thing half off his chair, and asked Madame Arnoul if indeed she entertained the dangerous fancy to—to sleep, save the mark!—in that terrible room, as his cousin, had written him. He knew his cousin, of course, to be an idiot, but—but no, the idea was not to be contemplated. Anyone insane enough to spend a night in that awful apartment would be found a strangled corpse in the morning.

Madame laughed, and replied that she did not

believe in ghosts; that she and her husband had laid a heavy bet on the point of sleeping in the haunted chamber, and surely Monsieur would not be the cause of their losing it.

With a pale face and slow steps, the major-domo went out to order a bed, and other preparations to be made in the room, for Madame and her husband—Ninon enacting that *rôle* in her masculine attire; and shortly after the two retired for the night, conducted to the door of the apartment by the pale-faced, agitated steward. No sooner were they alone than Madame Arnoul proceeded to make a close inspection of the wainscotted walls. Presently an exclamation of delight escaped her. "See here," she cried, and slipping her hand inside the gaping jaws of a hideous, reptile-like monster, carved in the woodwork of a panel just beside the bed, she pressed a knob in its throat, and the panel slid aside into a groove, disclosing beyond a much larger chamber, luxuriously furnished, and bearing evidence of being ready prepared for an occupant—"No less a person than His Majesty, Louis XIV.," explained Madame Arnoul, as she crossed the room towards the splendid Carrara marble chimneypiece supported at the corners by cherubim. Into the ear of one of them Madame put her finger, with the result of again sending open the panel, which, not a little to the nervous terror of Ninon, had closed behind them. The walls of this great State chamber were covered with gilded russia leather, which entirely concealed the movable panel between the rooms. Madame Arnoul laughingly began to

reassure her disturbed companion. "It was quite true," she said, "that a great many persons had been found dead from strangulation in that smaller chamber, some century earlier; but the ghosts were not responsible. The guilt lay with the then lord of the manor, the Comte de Ribeauvillé, who, ruined by debauch and gambling, enticed rich passing travellers to spend the night in his castle, lodged them in this bedchamber, and stealing in by the secret ways during the night, strangled and robbed his unfortunate guests. While Madame Arnoul told her tale, there was a knock at the door of the apartment, and the baggage of the two travellers was brought in and deposited on the floor. When they were alone again, Madame Arnoul, opening one of the trunks, drew forth a magnificent robe of brocade, a *cordon bleu*, and a small medallion locket, containing the portrait of Anne of Austria. Leading Ninon to a mirror, she placed the locket in her hands, and bade her compare her own countenance with that of the dead queen. A few touches here and there, a little filling out with stuffing, and Ninon would be the very double of the queen: Louis himself could not know them apart.

Some sort of light broke in upon Ninon. Was she to be the ghost of Anne of Austria? Just that; but Ninon shook her head. It would be simply profanation. "Not in such a good cause," smiled Madame Arnoul. "Not if it had the effect of terrifying the king into dismissing Madame de Montespan. It would be a most meritorious act, that."

Ninon's heart rose. "But if we should be found out?" she said.

"Trust me," smiled Madame Arnoul, and in a few moments she was sleeping the sleep that only the innocent and travel-tired know, in the great terrible bed of the haunted chamber.

At five o'clock in the morning there was a tap at the door. The steward had sent to inquire whether the night had been passed undisturbed. Madame Arnoul replied that nothing could have been more comfortable.

The Court arrived next day, and Louis XIV., greatly fatigued with the long journey, retired to bed at nine o'clock. Then began the royal toilette of Ninon. It was a work of time, for Ninon's figure called for considerable expansion, and her brown hair needed golden tints. These details achieved with consummate art, she donned the brocade gown and embroidered satins, and crowned the work with the *cordon bleu*. All being ready, Madame pressed the knob in the griffin's throat. The panel fell apart, and the deceased queen, Anne of Austria, appeared in the king's chamber.

His Majesty was in a deep sleep, and Ninon glided majestically to the bedside, lighted by the brilliant but somewhat quivering brilliancy of a phosphorescent torch which Madame Arnoul waved through the open panel.

Then Ninon laid her cold hand, half congealed by immersion for a length of time in iced water, upon the arm of Louis, and he awoke with a start,

and sitting up, stared with haggard, terrified gaze at the apparition.

"My mother!—my mother!" he gasped, in fear-suffocated tones.

Laying her finger on her lips, Ninon placed on the table, beside the bed, a paper, and pointing down on it, with a terrible frown on her brows, she glided backwards till she reached the panel, where she was lost in the gloom of the night, as Madame Arnoul extinguished the torch.

It was a hazardous game, and Ninon was half-dead with terror at its conclusion. Louis was, if possible, still more terrified; and as the two women stood listening in the Chamber of the Phantoms, they heard through the not quite closed panel the voice of their accomplice, Louis's *valet-de-chambre*, inquiring in agitated tones what ailed him.

The king could only articulate a command for a light, and by it he read the terrible warning against his courses of life, written by Madame Arnoul, who had feared that Louis would detect the fraud if Ninon had spoken her message. The forgery was perfect in its imitation of the queen's handwriting, a piece of which Madame Arnoul had contrived to procure, and it ran as follows:—

"SIRE,—Heaven is wrath at your disorderly life. Two mistresses, publicly acknowledged, shed on your kingdom a scandal which must be put an end to; above all, that one which violates the vows of marriage, and renders you guilty of twofold adultery. Heaven has permitted me to communicate this to you myself. This paper, which I

leave in your hands, I beg you to read, my son; weigh well each word; it will prove to you, when I have disappeared, that you have not been the victim of an illusion. Repent, Sire, and do not force the dead to leave their tombs any more. ANNE OF AUSTRIA."

Ninon did not close an eye all night. What if returning sense brought any suspicion of the deception into Louis's mind? He would order the adjoining rooms to be searched, and those lodged in them; and if the deceased queen's attire should be found in the valises of Madame Arnoul—Ah! it was terrible to think of! And no sooner day broke, than the two packed up their baggage, and cleared away from the Château of Ribeauvillé, not very easy in their minds till they were safe again in Paris, where they had not been especially missed during the few days' absence, and they preserved a golden silence upon their romantic adventure in the far-off Vosges.

CHAPTER XX

The crime of Madame Tiquet—A charming little Hand—*Aqua Toffana*—The Casket—A devout Criminal—The Sinner and the Saint—Monsieur de Lauzun's Boots—"Sister Louise"—La Fontanges—"Madame de Maintenant."—The Blanks in the Circle—The Vatican Fishes and their Good Example—Piety at Versailles—The Periwigs and the Paniers—Père la Chaise—A dull Court—Monsieur de St Evrémond's Decision.

THE eighteenth century in France is stained with the record of three criminal cases which glare forth in the annals of human wickedness. The last occurred in the latest years, and culminated in the trial and execution of the chief criminal, Madame Tiquet. Though she had accomplices—one of whom also suffered the extreme penalty—and although the murderous aim fell short, and the intended victim escaped, the attempt ont he life of Monsieur Tiquet—an esteemed magistrate—charged against his wife, made on two separate occasions, was held to be sufficient warranty for the capital sentence upon her. Still, since Monsieur Tiquet was living and well, the decision was much criticised. The Parliament was accused of exacting too great a penalty for the crime committed against itself, in the person of one of its members, and Monsieur Tiquet himself is said to have pleaded with the king personally for his wife's reprieve, but to no effect. Madame Tiquet was a beautiful woman, moving in

the best society, and extenuation was accordingly made by many, some even going the length of declaring belief in her entire innocence. But Madame Tiquet was decapitated on the Place de Grêve, while her chief accomplice, Jacques Moura, was hanged.

The enormity of this crime rivalled that of the recorded murder already narrated, of the Duchesse de Ganges, some score years earlier, these both being rivalled by the series of murders, perpetrated by poison, of the Marchioness de Brinvilliers. It is recorded in her connection, that

"In the plaster-cast shop is a small, delicate, plump little hand, dimpled and beautiful, which is sold to artists as a model. You take it in yours, handle it, admire it, almost fancy you are shaking hands with the good-humoured and festive little personage to whom it must have belonged. You ask whose it was, and are told that it was that of Madame de Brinvilliers, the notorious poisoner. You recoil as if you had been handling an asp."

Marguérite d'Aubrai was the daughter of one Monsieur d'Aubrai, lieutenant-civil of Paris, and she was married at an early age to the Marquis de Brinvilliers, to whom for a while she was devotedly attached. In time her affection waned in favour of a Gascon officer named St Croix, a worthless adventurer. Monsieur d'Aubrai, discovering his daughter's infatuation, obtained an order for the imprisonment of St Croix in the Bastille. During the year he was confined there, he contrived to make acquaintance with an Italian named Exili, who was an adept in the art of toxicology, and possessed the secret of the concoction of the terrible *Aqua Toffana*—to call

it by its best-known name, and as it was in its later form called by "la Toffana," the Neapolitan woman who got possession of the recipe from the reputed witch, la Sphara, the hag of a hundred years earlier, who was in the pay of the Borgias. In course of time the secret of the hideous brew—originally styled by la Sphara, "The Manna of St Nicolas of Bari"—had leaked out through the confessional, the father-confessors, appalled probably by the many penitential revelations made, had in course of generations given vent almost unwittingly to the disclosures of so many crimes at so many different hands; for it is said the "Manna," had poisoned over six hundred persons, and Exili had learnt the secret of the ingredients of the subtle mortal poison, which was a tasteless colourless drug. On the release of St Croix, the marchioness's mad love for him had only waxed greater, and when she had extracted from him this recipe for death, they planned together to poison her father, her sister, and two brothers successively, all in the same year of 1670, the marchioness, meanwhile, being apparently a most charitable and pious visitor of the sick in the Hôtel Dieu, and other hospitals of Paris, but suspected later of trying the effects of her potions on the various patients.

One day brought the discovery of the crimes of these two. The poisons that St Croix delighted in, were many of them, so deadly of breath, that he wore a glass mask to protect his face and lips from the vapours, and on one occasion, while he was at work, the mask fell off. He died instantly. No

one coming forward to claim the adventurer's effects, they fell into the hands of Government. Among the articles was a certain casket, which the marchioness claimed, and so insistently and vehemently, that the authorities became suspicious, and first had the casket opened. Its contents were composed of packets of many kinds of poisons, each ticketed with a description of the effects they produced. When she learned of the opening of the casket, the murderess made her escape to England; but still in terror of pursuit, she fled back to the Continent, where she was tracked down at Liège, and taken under arrest back to Paris. The crimes, one by one, were brought home to her, and she was condemned to be beheaded and burned. Refusing however, to plead, she was put to the question by the torture of swallowing water—"Surely," she cried, when she saw the three bucketfuls of water standing ready, "it is not intended to drown me, for it is absurd to suppose that a person of my dimensions can swallow all that!"

Not content with her own criminal work, she was proved to have supplied the means for it to many suspected of similar crimes. Implicated among those was the Duc de Luxembourg, and some of his friends, who, it will be remembered, were suspected of causing the death of the amiable and lamented Duchesse d'Orléans.

One person escaped who might well be supposed would have been one of the marchioness's first victims—her husband. It is believed that his indifference to her induced her to pass him over.

Madame de Sévigné, however, mentions the *on dit* that she did more than once attempt to poison Brinvilliers; but that St Croix, for his own reason, administered him an antidote, and the marquis survived to intercede for his wife's life, but, of course, ineffectually.

When she was arrested at Liège, a kind of general written formula framed in vague allusion to her criminal doings was found upon her, clearly for using in confession, to which she went with great regularity. This was sufficiently explicit to confirm the other evidences of her guilt.

"She communicated her poisons frequently in pigeon-pies—by which a great many were killed," writes Madame de Sévigné, "not from any particular reason for despatching them, but out of mere curiosity to try the effects of her drugs. The chevalier de Guet, who had been a guest at her delightful entertainments about three years ago, has been languishing ever since. She inquired the other day if he was dead; upon being answered 'No,' she said, turning her head on one side, 'He must have a very strong constitution then.' This Monsieur de la Rochefoucauld swears to be true."

During the next ensuing days, Madame de Sévigné's letters brim with details of the wretched woman's latest hours.

"At six o'clock on the morning of her execution," she writes, "la Brinvilliers was carried in a cart, stripped to her shift, with a cord about her neck, to the church of Nôtre Dame, to perform the *amende honorable*. She was then replaced in the cart, where I saw her lying at her length on a truss of straw, only her shift and a suit of plain head-clothes, with a confessor on one side and a

hangman on the other. Indeed, my dear, the sight made me shudder. Those who saw the execution say she mounted the scaffold with great courage."

Threatened with the question, it was not applied; since she said at last that she would confess everything, and an appalling confession it was. Repeatedly she had tried to poison her father, brother and several others, before she succeeded; and all under the appearance of the greatest love and confidence. Finally, Madame de Sévigné writes—

"At length all is over—la Brinvilliers is in the air; after her execution, her poor little body was thrown into a great fire, and her ashes dispersed by the wind. And so we have seen the end of a sinner. Her confessor says she is a saint!!"

After the death of Queen Maria Théresa, which occurred some little time before the fall of Madame de Montespan, the ascendency of the royal governess increased rapidly.

Madame Arnoul was now no longer the indispensable friend of Madame Scarron. She had come, in fact, to be so nearly an encumbrance, that Françoise had handed her over in marriage to a gentleman of Marseilles, with a portion of twenty thousand crowns, after having profited so excellently by the example of the intriguing skill of that past-mistress in the art, that she was quite capable henceforth of acting for herself.

Madame Scarron was not slow to mark the preponderating affection of Louis for his illegitimate children over the children of the queen, and that to

secure His Majesty's favour and goodwill, was to work to advance their interests by every possible means. She therefore took at its turn the tide of the ill-starred fortunes of Mademoiselle Montpensier's connection with de Lauzun, to win from her the duchy of Aumâle, the earldom of Eu, and the principality of Dombes, wherewith to endow the children, as the price paid for obtaining from Louis the pardon and release of de Lauzun, from Pignerol. Then came the turn of Lauzun to extract from Mademoiselle, for himself, the duchy of Saint Fargeau, the barony of Thiers in Auvergne, also a huge income from the salt-tax in Languedoc. That done, de Lauzun showed himself for the base ungrateful creature he was. That before his incarceration at Pignerol a secret marriage had been made between them, had always been the supposition; since otherwise she would not, it was thought, have tolerated his treatment of her now, nor all the insults his fertile imagination devised for heaping on her. One day, in the presence of others, he had the cruelty to find fault with her style of dress as entirely out of keeping with her age. Another time he accused her of being the cause of all his sufferings at Pignerol. No money, he declared, would ever make up for it. He was for ever extorting from her money or jewels, which he lost at cards. Then he strove to obtain from her the sole command and control of all she still possessed; but the worm will turn, and Mademoiselle refused. This enraged him to a pitch that spared her no insults, and his finishing touch was to stretch out

his foot one day when he visited her at Choisy, and desire her to pull off his boots. Mademoiselle turned scornfully away, and in a little while sought consolation and refuge from these indignities in religious exercises of the most rigid kind.

Mademoiselle de la Vallière, another broken-hearted woman, also about this time entered into the convent of the Carmelites. She took the veil, and passed the rest of her days a veritable saint under the name of "Sister Louise de la Miséricorde."

Madame de Montespan, finding all attempts to regain the old empire over Louis in vain, subsequently made some endeavour to live a more creditable life.

And meanwhile the star of Françoise rose higher and higher in the royal firmament. The flickering meteor known as Mademoiselle de Fontanges hardly ruffled her placidity. To Ninon, Françoise merely referred to her as a proof that the intimacy in which she herself lived with the king, was no more than one of pure warm friendship, and had never exceeded those limitations.

As for la Fontanges, she is best known to posterity by the extraordinary head-dress she adopted. Ugly as it was, it remained in fashion for half a score of years. It was a structural arrangement of eight divisions, in wire, covered with pieces of muslin, bows of ribbon, interlaced with curls. These divisions were severally called: la Duchesse, le Solitaire, le Chou, le Mousquetaire, le Croissant, le Firmament, le Septième Ciel, and la Souris. (The Duchess, the Solitary, the Cabbage, the Musketeer,

the Crescent, the Firmament, the Seventh Heaven and the Mouse.)

The king now bought for Madame Scarron the château and estate of Maintenon, in Brittany, on the banks of the Gave near Chartres, and by his desire she was henceforth called "Madame de Maintenon." Perhaps hardly so much at his desire, there were some about who made a slight change in the orthography of the last syllable, and called her "Madame de *Maintenant*."

Her marriage with Louis is believed to have been celebrated in the chapel of the château[1] in 1683—she being fifty and the king forty-seven years old—in the presence of Harlay and Louvois, the nuptial knot being tied by the confessor of the marquise, Père la Chaise. She further obtained his appointment to the office of the king's confessor.

Père la Chaise was a priest of the Company of Jesus, a man, if "neither fanatical nor fawning," intolerant of all religious creeds outside his own; and now, holding the conscience of Louis XIV. and of Madame Louis XIV., Père la Chaise soon became a power in the land.

One by one death was bearing away the friends of Ninon's earlier years. The death of Madame de Chevreuse, at Port Royal, was followed close by that of Madame de Longueville. Madame de Maintenon's prediction that de la Rochefoucauld would quickly follow her to whom his heart had been unchangingly given, was verified. A few months, and Marsillac,

[1] St Simon.

the friend of Ninon's merry days at Loches, was no more.

A deep melancholy darkened in upon Ninon as she thought of all those gone hence, and the many missing now from the circle in the rue des Tournelles, although new faces were not wanting there, and she maintained the old hospitalities. She was not sorry, however, to put an end to these for a while, in order to fall in with the proposition of Monsieur le Nôtre, that she, with Madame de la Fayette, should accompany him to Rome, whither he was bound with his friend, the poet Santeuil, a canon of St Victor, who was making the journey in order to try and obtain the sanction of the pope to the use of a certain collection of Latin hymns he had composed—in all the churches of Christendom; while the pope was anxious to consult the royal gardener upon the laying out of the parterres of the Vatican.

They went by way of Geneva, Turin, Parma, and Florence, and arrived in Rome. His Holiness received the travellers with the most gracious and fatherly of welcomes, surrounded by all the members of the Sacred College. After a while he conducted the visitors to the gardens, where he paused on the brink of a great pond, containing fish of all kinds, some of them carp two hundred years old. Presently one of the cardinals rang a bell hanging to a post near the water's edge, and all the fishes came swimming with lightning rapidity, their heads lifting high above the surface of the water, and a page approached with two baskets, one filled with bread-crumbs, the other with grain. These dainties the

pope threw into the pond to his favourites, who snapped up every morsel in a trice. Then the bell rang again, the fish twisted and turned joyously for a little while, as if to display their gratitude and satisfaction, and then disappeared. De Santeuil remarked that the fish set a fine example to the religious Orders, observing so excellently as they did, the rule of silence, and drinking nothing but water. The observation was not very cordially received by either the pope or his cardinals, and in any case, de Santeuil, who did not then obtain the permission to use his hymns, was inclined to blame the fishes. Some grace was accorded the hymns later; but the Consistory was of opinion that they bore a flavour of paganism.

Ninon, on returning from the Holy City to Paris, found Corneille at the point of death. Memories now were her best consolation, and though she had not been eight months away from Paris, she found as many changes on her return, as if she had been absent a century. The king, to begin with, had become converted, and the Court had followed suit. Everyone was occupied with the concerns of his future salvation. The king had cut off his moustache, and the courtiers had all shaved their upper lips. As His Majesty had decided that a grey wig would add to his air of respectability, everybody had powdered their hair. Hitherto, hair-powder had been used by women only. Hair had become so enormously expensive, that moderately-supplied purses had to be content with a thin kind of crape puffed into curls.

The *justaucorps*, after having developed into a cassock kind of garment, was now a coat, and the nether clothes Ninon considered to have grown disgracefully ugly in shape.

The women had borrowed from Spain the hideous deformity of *vertugadins*, cage-like objects composed of wire, horsehair, or both, which they bound upon their hips, to extend the hang of their petticoats. On the top of this monstrosity came the panier, a whalebone contrivance covered with cloth stuff, put to similar ends, and so greatly obstructing the thoroughfares, that the women were frequently obliged to stand on one side to allow of others passing. Pairing off with the older fashions, went the old French natural gaiety, graceful manners and conversation, and pompous deportment and stilted formalities of speech were the vogue. Ninon almost found consolation for growing old in face of these dreary surroundings, fostered and assiduously tended by Madame Louis Quatorze and her Jesuit director, Père la Chaise. Of what consequence was France and her well-being, provided these two carried their own ends to fruition?

Possibly this altered state of things had something to do with Monsieur de St Evrémond's decision to remain in England, where the natural atmosphere might be brumous, but the social conditions far less lugubrious. He wrote, at all events, to Ninon that, everything considered, he preferred to remain where he had now been for fifteen years, and would content himself with correspondence with her, and "I shall read with vast satisfaction

about things which you will tell me that I know," he writes, "but above all, tell me of the things about which I do not know."

And Ninon did write bright letters to her old friend, full of chat and the social events of the day, as of the days that were past—a sort of long confession, in which she did not specially spare anyone; certainly not herself.

CHAPTER XXI

A distinguished Salon—The Duke's Homage—Quietism—The disastrous Edict—The writing on the Window-pane—The persecution of the Huguenots—The Pamphleteers—The story of Jean Larcher and *The Ghost of M. Scarron*—The two Policies.

"THE house of Mademoiselle de L'Enclos," writes a contemporary author, "was then, 1694, the rendezvous of the persons of the Court and of the city who were regarded as the most intellectually gifted and estimable. The house of Ninon was, perhaps, in these latter years of her life, the only one where talent and wit found fair breathing-room, and where the time was passed without card-playing and without ennui, and until the age of eighty-seven she was sought by the best company of the time."

"And," writes another eminent chronicler—

"Ninon had illustrious friends of all sorts, and showed such wit and tact that she never failed to keep them in good humour with each other; or at all events free of petty differences. Her friends were of the most refined and mentally gifted of the people of the Court; so that it was esteemed very desirable to mingle with them in her salon. There was never any gaming, nor loud laughter, nor disputing, nor religious or political discussion, but much flow of wit, and conversing on topics new and old, subjects of sentiment or of gallantry, but these never transgressing the bounds of good taste. All was delicate, graceful, well-balanced, and furnished themes which she was well able to render full of interest from her stores of memories of so many past years. The consideration she had acquired, the number and distinction of her friends and acquaintance, continued to be her attraction when the charm of

her beauty had faded. She knew all about the intrigues of the present Court, as of the old, serious and otherwise. Her conversation was charming, disinterested, frank, guarded, and accurate at every point, and almost to a weakness blameless and pure. She frequently assisted her friends with money, and would enter for them into important negotiations, and ever faithfully guarded money and secrets entrusted to her keeping. All these things won for her a repute and respect of the most marvellous kind."

Such, on the testimony of the Marquis de la Fare and of St Simon, was the Ninon de L'Enclos of the closing years of her life and of the century. She herself records, with pardonable pride, that "when the great Condé used to meet her out driving, he would descend from his carriage, and cause the window of hers to be let down, that he might offer her his compliments."

It has been said that Paris no longer had any salon except hers where people of wit and breeding and celebrity forgathered. There came Racine, her near neighbour, Boileau, Fontenelle, la Fontaine, Huydens, Bussy Rabutin, Charleval, Montreuil, la Fare, Benserade, Desmarets, Quinault, La Bruyère, and with them many of the prominent men and women of the Court. Thither also came frequently Fénelon, and it was in Ninon's salon that his relative, Madame Guyon, first expounded her doctrine of Quietism.

Now and again Madame de Maintenon would come to the rue des Tournelles, and Ninon concedes that she had the good taste not to unduly assert herself on these occasions; though the air of strict and devout propriety seemed ever more and more

to enfold her. At that time she showed considerable favour to the theories of Madame Guyon and of Fénelon; but the Jesuit Père la Chaise had small appreciation of anything savouring of liberty of conscience, and the Edict of Nantes was imminent, the evil thing engendered in the brain of the trio ruling him whose proud mottoes, "*Nec pluribus impor*," "*Vires acquiret eundo*," so belied the weak, superstitious shadow into which the Grand Monarque had faded.

Louis's liking for his Huguenot subjects had always been so entirely of the smallest, that it verged on hatred. Thanks to Mazarin's plan of mental cultivation for him, his understanding of the doctrinal questions at issue between Catholic and Calvinist was so infinitesimal as to be of no account. It was his arrogant claim of authority over the minds and bodies of his subjects, far more than any spiritual convictions, which needed but the representations of Madame de Maintenon, of the egotistical, vain and unsympathetic minister Louvois, and of the Jesuit intolerance of Père la Chaise, to fire the smouldering flame of extermination of the "reformed" Christianity of France; and on the 22nd of October, 1685, was re-enacted the new version of the tragedy of St Bartholomew, the chief *rôle* in it played by the descendant of the murdered Coligny's friend, who had been the progenitor of Françoise d'Aubigné, the ambitious Madame Louis Quatorze. Gentle and patient in adversity, as Scarron's wife, admirable, and perhaps really lovable, in that far-off day

when she did not even then scruple, and successfully, to win her friend Ninon's lover away from her — a fact by no means forgotten, nor likely to be, recorded as Monsieur de Villarceaux had recorded it at the time on a window of "the Yellow Room" in the rue des Tournelles. There, diamond-graven on the pane of glass, that erotic quatrain proclaimed the charms of Françoise as unmistakably as ever; and though Ninon had no part in it, somehow the lines found their way into Monsieur Loret's journal, and forthwith it created other couplets, which commemorated more than one incident in the life of Madame Louis Quatorze. The precious rhyming ran into several verses, varied only by the several names of Madame's former admirers, starting gaily with Monsieur de Villarceaux :

"On est ravi que le roi notre sire,
Aime la d'Aubigné
Moi, Villarceaux, je mén créve de rire,
Hi! hé! hi! hi! hi! hé!
Puis je dirai, sans être plus lestes,
Tu n'as que mes restes,
Toi!
Tu n'as que nos restes," etc. etc.

Briefly, the French nation looked with contempt on the left-handed marriage contracted by the king. Madame de Maintenon, less a bigot than an assumed one, hypocritical, ambitious, wrapped about in a veil of piety, ruled Louis to the disaster of the country. She was calmly, ruthlessly cruel in her methods of fostering the natural passion of Louis for getting all under his own control. Not content

with the grasp of government which Richelieu had bequeathed to him, and he had retained with iron hand, he only too readily allowed himself to be urged to acquire the grip of the consciences of his subjects. The Edict of Nantes, established by the other great king, which had brought peace to the distracted land, and permitted the Protestants freedom of worship after their own simple forms, was revoked, religious intolerance was once more rampant, and to such a degree, that a few months later, a second edict deprived the Huguenots of keeping their children. The quick death of the night of St Bartholomew only took on now the guise of slow torture, prolonged into years, which witnessed the departure of an industrious community, and sowed the dragon's teeth of revolution, which in less than another hundred years was to ripen into such fearful harvesting. Discontent prevailed, deep hatred rankled against the despotism of Versailles. The faults of Louis, glaring as they had ever been, had hitherto been toned in the eyes of his people by the brilliancy and glory of martial successes, and of great achievement in civil government; but victory was no longer constant, and the Thirty Years' War had exhausted the public funds.

The enormous prodigality of the king's mode of life was beginning to be more and more recognised for the evil it was. The Sun-King's light was fast dimming; the people no longer worshipped from afar, and the death-stroke to his popularity and renown waned as the domination of Madame de Maintenon waxed ever more powerful. The

pamphleteers fell to work. Many such productions found circulation in spite of the efforts of the police to run them to earth. One of marked effect was entitled, *The Sighs of Enslaved France for Liberty*, and was widely read. The liberal sentiments of the pamphlets made deep impression. When they were detected in any person's possession, the unfortunate students were forthwith conducted to the torture-chamber or the Bastille; and while stricture on Louis was harshly enough dealt with, it was mild compared with any attacks on Madame de Maintenon. The king was so entirely conscious of the great political mistake he had made in his marriage with her, that it enraged him to be reminded of it. One of the tractates was called *The Ghost of M. Scarron*, and it was adorned with a picture parodying the statue of Louis on the Place des Victoires, whose four allegorical figures of its pedestal were replaced in the pamphlet picture by the figures of la Vallière, de Montespan, Fontanges, and de Maintenon. One morning the king found a copy of this literary effort under his breakfast napkin, and Madame Louis Quatorze also found one under hers. It was the princes of the blood who were her most bitter enemies, and their powerful influence fomented the enmity, and contrived to defeat, again and again, the endeavours of Monsieur de la Reynie, the lieutenant of police, to bring the pamphleteers to "justice."

The Ghost of M. Scarron was the crowning offence, and Monsieur de la Reynie was summoned

to Versailles, and commanded at any cost to track down the authors of this pamphlet.

It was a fearful dilemma for Monsieur de la Reynie; that it would end in his disgrace he could not doubt, and whenever the king chanced to see the unhappy lieutenant, he flung reproaches at him on account of the terrible "ghost."

Curious chance came to the rescue of Monsieur de la Reynie; but to the undoing and judicial murder of an innocent man, one Jean Larcher, ending up with a horrible tragedy. This Jean Larcher, who had sustained a loss of some 5000 livres, which had been stolen from his house, came to the lieutenant of police to lodge his complaint, in the hope that the thief might be traced. No sooner had he given his name, than Monsieur de la Reynie summoned a police officer, and whispering a few words in his ear, bade him accompany Larcher, who was a bookbinder, to his house in the rue des Lions St Paul. Larcher, delighted at the prompt and interested attention shown him, grew communicative as he went along, and gave the officer much information as to the exact position of the receptacles in which he stored his money and stock in trade. On arriving, the officer, changing his courteous demeanour, called to two of the small throng of soldiers and police standing about in front of the bookbinder's door, and bidding them keep him well in their charge, and follow him upstairs in company with another officer, went first to a room on the first floor, where he told the man to climb to the top of a certain cupboard, loaded with papers

and pamphlets ready for the binder, and bring them down. Selecting one of these, the officer placed it in the hands of Larcher, who turned white as a sheet, for it was a copy of *The Ghost of M. Scarron.* The unfortunate man, without more ado, was hurried off under arrest to the Châtelet, and thence, before any great loss of time, to the torture-chamber, three times suffering there, and finally to the gibbet, where he died bravely, and firmly asserting his innocence to the last.

There came a time when he was justified. The whole matter proved to be an infamous plot, concocted by a scoundrel who had an intrigue with Larcher's wife. This man was Larcher's assistant, and afterwards married the widow. At a later time Larcher's son discovered that the wretched fellow had placed the pamphlets where they were come upon in Larcher's house, and then had written an anonymous letter to Monsieur de la Reynie, informing him of where they were to be found. On tracking the exact truth and circumstances of this abominable treachery, the young man broke, in the dead of night, into the house where the couple lived, and murdered both. He was arrested; but he was saved from public death by brain-fever, which struck him down while he was in prison.

At the time of the conviction of Larcher, it was more than believed that he was innocent; but, in the first place, M. de la Reynie had his own safety and position to consider, and somebody had to bear the brunt; and secondly, riding very hard on the heels of it, Larcher was a

Protestant, and furthermore guilty of the enormity of remaining in communication with his child, who had been sent for protection to England.

The pope was far more tolerant in his desires for dealing with the French Protestants, than was the quartette at Versailles. The liberal spirit of the Gallican Church was ignored to feed the contemptible ambition of the converted Françoise d'Aubigné, and to lull to rest the conscience of the pusillanimous nonentity still called the King of France. The persecution of the Huguenots was carried on relentlessly for fifteen years; fire and sword, and rape and murder, were the lot of those who remained to brave the booted emissaries of M. Louvois, if they retaliated where they had the chance, and as they did fiercely in the terrible struggles in the Cévennes. Justice is even-handed: it was no time to turn the cheek to be smitten. Those who emigrated, as in such thousands they did, carried with them the commerce and the prosperity of France. Frugal and industrious for the most part, and in these later days at least, peacefully disposed, rarely seeking more than to be let alone, they were the mainstay of the country. Richelieu had fully recognised their value, and followed it in his policy with them. The "Old Woman of Versailles," as she was widely called, reversed the great cardinal's provisions, and in time the avengement fell.

The clergy generally carried out the orders issued from Versailles for the extermination of the heretics. Monseigneur d'Orléans and the Abbé de Fénelon alone resisted. The first afforded

time for the Huguenots to make their preparations for emigrating from France, by lodging the soldiery, sent to disperse them by violence, in his own palace, and maintaining them at his own expense, forbidding them meanwhile to harm any one of the Huguenot families in his diocese. For Monsieur de Fénelon, selected to superintend the raid of the *booted missionaries* in Poitou and Saintonge, he, like the Bishop of Orléans, forbade them to use violence, and brought back more of the errant ones into the Catholic fold by his sweet, persuasive eloquence, than the rest of the priests did, with all their *dragonnades* and executioner assistants, notwithstanding the view of Madame de Maintenon and of her spiritual director: that if only the holy Apostles had employed such emissaries of fire and sword, the Christian religion would not have been half so long in establishing.

CHAPTER XXII

Mademoiselle de L'Enclos' *Cercle*—Madeleine de Scudéri—The Abbé Dubois—"The French Calliope," and the Romance of her Life—"*Revenons à nos Moutons*"—A Resurrection?—Racine and his Detractors—"Esther"—*Athalie* and St Cyr—Madame Guyon and the Quietists.

Among the ladies of distinction forming the *cercle* of Mademoiselle de L'Enclos at this time, were the Countesses de la Sablière, de la Fayette, and de Sévigné, de Souvré, de la Suza, d'Olonne, de Sandwich, the Marquises de Wardes, de Créquy, de St Lambert; the Duchesses de Sully and de Bouillon, and the Maréchales de Castelnau and de la Ferté. The old antagonism between Ninon and Mademoiselle de Scudéri was smoothed away also by the amiable intervention of Madame de Sévigné, and the autumn of the lives of these two women was cheered by the sunshine of a genuine friendship, which, however, Boileau did his best to dull, by asserting that the famous romanticist of her day did not merit her popularity. Ninon succeeded however, in bringing him to soften his severe criticisms on Madeleine's works, until they became gentler even than her own views of the voluminous tales which she regarded as far too wordy, and almost destitute of the passion which should be the motive power of romance.

Mademoiselle de Scudéri in everyday life

was, however, amiable and charming in manner and conversation—so that her personal appearance, which was far from prepossessing, hardly detracted from her fascination. She was plain of feature, and of masculine build, but this had not come in the way of the idolatrous admiration, in former days, of Conrard, the Secretary of the Académie Française; and Pelisson, the advocate and faithful friend of the ill-fated Fouquet, remained true as ever to his ardent worship of her. The years of Madeleine de Scudéri ran even to a length beyond those of her friend Ninon. She died in her ninety-fourth year.

Among the brilliant company assembling almost nightly in the salon of the rue des Tournelles, one day came, unbidden and unwelcomed, the Abbé Dubois, he who at a later time was to acquire such a prominent position at the Court of the Regency, and die a cardinal. For this man, more notorious than celebrated, Ninon conceived an instinctive dislike. The ferret face repelled her, but she did not refuse him the letter of introduction he sought of her to Monsieur de St Evrémond in London, whither he was bound.

The "French Calliope," Madame Deshoulières, was an intimate friend of Mademoiselle de L'Enclos. Her career was romantic and even heroic. Her maiden name was Anne Antoinette Ligier de la Garde, she was a goddaughter of Anne of Austria, who held her at the font when she was christened. She was the daughter of the queen's *maître d'hôtel*, and was born in one of the little apartments of the

Louvre. Beauty and grace and high talent distinguished her as she grew up. Her father caused her to be very strictly reared, and no books were permitted her except philosophical and religious works. One day, however, she detected her maid reading one of the pastoral romances of d'Urfé. She was immediately fired with desire, as a true daughter of Eve, to taste of the delightful fruit of the vice of romantic fiction, and said she would ask her father's permission for it. This frightened the *bonne* so much, that, to purchase her charge's silence, she offered to lend her the interesting history of *The Shepherds of Lignon*, in which she had been so surreptitiously absorbed ; and upon these followed the novels of Calprenède and of Madeleine de Scudéri. But if these books sufficed for all the intellectual needs of the run of the young ladies of the period, Antoinette was a girl of brains, and soon returned to her first love of more healthy and solid literature, and of poetry ; and she studied for some time the art of versification under Hesnaut, whose fame is best remembered by the gifts of his pupil.

At eighteen she became the wife of Monsieur de Boisguerry, Seigneur Deshoulières, a gentleman of Poitou, in the service of the Prince de Condé. The queen had been displeased at this marriage, whereat Monsieur de la Garde explained that his child had to be provided for, and his emolument in Her Majesty's service had not been so great that it could be forthcoming from that source. This offended the queen, and the offence was aggravated by the suspicion of Frondeur leanings hanging

about him, so that Antoinette's dowry from her royal godmother was but a small one.

Three months after their marriage, Monsieur Deshoulières was summoned to follow Condé to Spain, and his wife returned to her old home, which was, however, no longer at the Louvre, but in a small house at Auteuil.

Here she spent the time in study, finding her chief delight in the philosophical works of Gassendi, now for some years a professor of the College of France. On the return of her husband to the frontier, she hastened to meet him, and the two repaired to Brussels, where the Court received her with high distinction ; but in addition to her acquirements, her grace and beauty won her admiration so marked, that it became aggressive, and she was forced to repulse the unwelcome attentions thrust upon her. This turned friends into enemies, who satisfied their revenge by representing her as a spy of Mazarin and of the queen—a far-fetched accusation enough, which, however, obtained wide credence.

The State payments to her husband were now withheld, and on seeking redress from the minister she was decreed an arrest, and sent for imprisonment to Vilvorde, where she was doomed to spend fourteen months in complete solitude, and kept from all means of communication with her friends. But Antoinette's girlhood had been passed in the days when natural feminine weakness had been fortified by stirring public events, and Madame Deshoulières consoled herself with theological

study during the time of her imprisonment, mainly of the Fathers, from Origen to St Augustine.

Only after a length of time Monsieur Deshoulières discovered the prison in which his wife was immured. Having ascertained this, he formed the bold project of carrying her off. To this end he engaged forty men, armed them to the teeth, and in the dead of a dark night, he led them to the edge of the moat of the Castle of Vilvorde, at its narrowest and shallowest part, stationing his men in the water, which they had previously filled with branches and mud, so as to form a human bridge. Arrived at the base of the wall, he fixed a ladder to the ramparts, and mounting, followed by his guard with stealthy caution, overpowered the two sentinels and gagged them. Then they hastened on to the governor's bedroom, and putting a cord round his neck while he was in profound sleep, and a musket to his face, they detained him in durance till he had yielded up the keys of his captive's apartments, and of the doors of the fortress. The garrison was then forced to lay down arms, and entering a waiting berline, Monsieur Deshoulières and his rescued wife gained in a few hours the ground of France.

The tidings of this intrepid act travelled as fast as they did, and Le Tellier, the Secretary of State, presented the pair to the queen and Mazarin. Anne of Austria embraced her goddaughter warmly, a general amnesty was proclaimed, and all was forgotten—so much forgotten, that Mazarin and the queen omitted to award Deshoulières the promised arrears of pay, and the pension which was to reward the two. The

debts and liabilities of Deshoulières became formidable, and he had no alternative but to obtain a division of maintenance, pay up from his own small resources all he could, and retire with his wife to live on the slender dowry Anne had bestowed on her goddaughter. It did not nearly suffice for their rank and position. In order to meet their requirements, Madame Deshoulières devoted herself to her pen, and her verses, first published in the *Mercure Galant*, won universal admiration, but no money reward. Left to itself, the nature of the editor ever inclines to the view that *kudos* is enough for the author, and this particular editor gave his contributor to understand that she ought to consider herself only too fortunate to have made an appearance in his pages.

Once again the admirers looked askance and grew scornful and sarcastic, and the humour of Madame Deshoulières' pen acquiring the sombre tints of her cruel fortunes, she was nicknamed the "*Mendicant Muse.*" So, with the addition of three children to maintain, the poor woman remained until the death of Monsieur Deshoulières, forsaken by her old troops of friends and admirers. Then she penned the immortal trifle beginning—

> "Dans ces près fleuris
> Qu' arrose la Seine,
> Cherchez qui vous mêne,
> Mes chères brébis."

It was her charming device for winning the attention and generosity of Louis XIV., and attained its end.

The king awarded her a pension of two thousand livres, and the editor of the *Mercure Galant*, laying the credit of this good fortune to his own account, straightened out things by continuing to publish Madame Deshoulières' verses *gratis* in his columns.

Once more the fine-weather friends flocked about her, and belauded her attractions, personal and intellectual. In these lay no exaggeration, for Antoinette Deshoulières was exceptionally gifted. Her conversation was brilliant, delicate, and sparkling with originality. The poets chanted her praises, and Benserade changed his sobriquet of the "*Mendicant Muse*" to the "*Calliope Française*." Among other well-remembered trifles from her pen, the pretty poem of *Les Oiseaux* is to be recorded. It is by these charming productions that the memory of Antoinette Deshoulières lives. Her aims in graver poetry and drama fell below their mark. For her, these were the unattainable, and possibly it was failure in this direction which impelled her to a jealousy unworthy of her excellent judgment and native good taste, when she rendered high praise to the *Phèdre* of Pradon, and criticised in a satirical poem the grand tragedy of Racine on the same subject.

From every point of view it was a lamentable mistake, and laid her open to storms of sarcastic abuse—

"Dans un fauteuil doré Phèdre tremblante
Et blême
Dit des vers ou d'abord personne n'entend rien."

So wrote Madame Deshoulières, and the flippancy on the tremendous theme evoked general disgust. "What is this tumbled from the clouds?" cried Madame de la Sablière. "This sweet and interesting shepherdess, who talked so tenderly to her sheep and flowers and birds, has suddenly changed her crook into a serpent!"

Madame de Sévigné preferred to be entirely of the opinion of Madame Deshoulières, but if envy of the great tragic poet was in the heart of the one, personal animosity was beyond question in that of the other; for Madame de Sévigné had never forgiven either Boileau or Racine for favouring the intrigue of her grandson, de Grignan with the Champmeslé.

Madame Deshoulières burned with desire for dramatic honours, and she wrote a tragedy called *Genséric*. It was a feeble, ill-constructed piece of work, and was ill-received; but it was not to be forgotten, for it perpetuated the immortal figure of speech, as familiar in England as in France, of the advice to her—"Return to your sheep" (*anglicé*—"Let us go back to our muttons").*

Once again she wooed the drama in the guise of comedy and opera; but her efforts were signal failures. She died at the age of sixty-two, of the same malady as her godmother, and, like her, she bore the cruel suffering with patience and resignation, writing in the intervals of pain a paraphrase of the Psalms, and her *Reflections Morales*, one of her best works. Bossuet, who administered to her the last consolations of religion, spoke in warm eulogy of those last days of hers.

* Mâitre Patelin.

A singular circumstance disturbed the smooth flow of Mademoiselle de L'Enclos' life at this time. It was the sudden appearance of an aged woman who declared herself to be Marion Delorme, and claiming a fifty-seven years' friendship with Ninon.

She declared that the report of her death had been false; that the doctor, Guy Patin, had not attended her funeral; but had saved her life, and then she had left Paris and lived out of France.

Convinced as Ninon was, that the poor woman was demented, or attempting to impose on her, she sent to the Street of the Dry Tree, where Guy Patin lived; but the doctor was absent in Prussia, sharing the exile of his son, who had been condemned for being in possession of six copies of one of the libellous pamphlets that made life hideous for the king and Madame Louis Quatorze, and no other testimony, for or against, was to be found. The magistrate to whom the unhappy creature had applied to verify her identity, hastened a little later to assure Ninon that to communicate with Guy Patin would be troubling him to no purpose; since the Marion Delorme, as she called herself, had given unmistakable proof of madness, and she had been placed in the Hôtel Dieu. So the matter ended.

The shafts, impotent as they were, of Madame Deshoulières had an evil effect on Racine. Ninon, warmly seconded by St Evrémond especially, endeavoured to win the great tragic poet from his exclusive associations with the Court; but he turned a deaf ear to every argument. It is possible that the atmosphere of Versailles, as it

prevailed under the ordering of Madame de Maintenon, tainted and unhealthy as it was with pharisaical "piety," assorted with the sentiments of gloom ill-health had fostered, for Racine suffered cruelly, long before his death, from an abscess on the liver. Moreover, by education and rearing he was a Port Royalist, and the tenets of Jansenism could but have run in his blood. In her earlier time Madame de Maintenon had looked favourably on these Calvinistic sectaries of the Catholic Church; only at a later date it was that the rupture occurred with the Abbé Fénelon and Madame Guyon, the notable advocate of the doctrines of the Quietest, Michael Molinos the Spanish monk. Madame Guyon, whose maiden name was de la Motte, evinced mystic tendencies even as a child. As she grew up, it was her wish to enter a convent; but her parents prevented this, and she was married at sixteen. At eight-and-twenty she became a widow, and then the old mystic sentiments began to rule her more dominantly than ever. This was further fostered in her by her confessor and other ecclesiastics about her, who persuaded her that she was destined by Heaven to be a powerful agent for the advancement of religion.

"Still young," says Voltaire, "with beauty, riches, and a mind fitted for society, she became infatuated with what is called *spiritualism*. Her confessor whose name was Lacombe, a man of a nature at once passionate and devout, and who died mad, plunged the mind of his penitent deeper into the mystic reveries by which it was

already affected. Her doctrine," Voltaire goes on to say, "was a complete renunciation of self, the silence of the soul, the annihilation of all its faculties, internal worship, and the pure and disinterested love of God, which is neither degraded by fear nor animated by the hope of reward."

There were times, however, that religious enthusiasm, following its customary tendency, betrayed her into extravagance, and absurdities of speech in her efforts to explain her views.

By her written treatises, and by her orations, Madame Guyon made many proselytes. For five years she travelled from place to place in Piedmont and Dauphiné; then returning to Paris, she continued her labours for two years, uninterfered with. Suddenly the Archbishop of Paris, one of the most infamously profligate of priests on record, Harlay de Chamvallon, found himself horrified at discovering that Madame Guyon's teaching was neither more nor less than that of Molinos, whose Jansenist theories of grace and free-will were in direct opposition to the Jesuitical tenets, then, of course, all-dominant at Versailles. He pretended to hold Father Lacombe as a seducer, and sent him to the Bastille; while Madame Guyon was put under arrest into the convent of the Visitandines, where she won universal love, and many believers in her mild faith. From here Madame de Maintenon, who had made her acquaintance at Ninon's house, and bore her considerable affection and esteem, freed her, and gave her a home in St Cyr. There she was introduced to Fénelon, and they formed their firm and life-long friendship.

Madame de Maintenon, however, instigated by the bigoted Bishop of Chartres, who was director of the consciences of the young ladies of St Cyr and their teachers, ere long withdrew her favour, falling in also with the prejudices the king had against her. Among other persecutions to which she was now subjected, was the production of a letter from Lacombe, or purporting to be from him, exhorting her to repent of her criminal intimacy with him. The unhappy man, always of a highly nervous, excitable nature, had now long been insane, and the accusation was believed by no one. Later, she was again imprisoned at Vincennes, and in the Bastille, whence she was delivered by de Noailles, the successor of the infamous Harlay. But here her sufferings did not end. Once more she was imprisoned in the Bastille, and finally she was exiled to Blois, where she spent the last fifteen years of her life, in acts of charity and piety, graced ever by unswerving patience; but while occasionally betrayed into extravagance of expression on religious points, her common sense and excellent judgment in everyday matters were remarkable.

CHAPTER XXIII

A Grave Question—The Troublesome Brother-in-Law—"No Vocation"—The Duke's Choice—Peace for la Grande Mademoiselle—An Invitation to Versailles—Behind the Arras—Between the Alternatives—D'Aubigné's Shadow—A Broken Friendship.

While the persecution of His Majesty's Protestant subjects was being ruthlessly carried on by fire and sword, and *dragonnading* generally, a matter of the gravest moment was under consideration at Versailles, and there was wide division of opinion in high places. It was on the question of the *Fontanges* head-gear, and for once the king openly set his face against that of Madame de Maintenon, which, he declared, now appeared in the middle of her body, and, he added, by no means enhanced its charm; for the height of the ugly head-dress had risen to two feet. Eloquence, mild argument, raillery and angry words from the Grand Monarque, however, simply fell on stony ground. Two gauze horns had been added to the abominable structure of whalebone, ribbon, horsehair, etc., etc. These projections were fixed behind the ears, and carried upward, crowning the work. The Sun-King's defeat was complete, "*Vires acquirit eundo. Nec pluribus impar*": his mottoes were ever mocking him, and lest the *Fontanges* should mount higher still, he said no more.

He had better success on the frontiers, where

Catinat in Piedmont, and Luxembourg in Flanders, brilliant pupil of Condé, routed the enemy. In this expedition Madame de Maintenon secured the advancement of de Villars, the lover who had consoled her days of widowhood; and the first step to glory made, he mounted rapidly, proving himself one of the bravest of the campaign.

Another thorn in the side of Louis, or rather more absolutely of Madame, was her brother. Years had not mended d'Aubigné's ways; he was just the same *vaurien* of a *bon viveur* and gourmet, he had been in his bouts with Scarron.

De Santeuil, the poet-canon who had been one of the party when Ninon travelled to Rome, was now d'Aubigné's *Fidus Achates*, and they were fairly evenly matched in their modes of life. Santeuil was invited one morning by Ninon to breakfast with her. D'Aubigné naturally came too, expressing himself delighted, he said, to kiss Ninon's hand once more after such an interval of years. He inquired whether she still kept up her acquaintance with his *bégueule* of a sister.

"Is it so you speak of a person who has made the glory of your family?" demanded Ninon.

D'Aubigné did not regard the case at all in this light. It was a good joke to call her that, he said, and added that he was furious against his brother-in-law. "Don't you know why?" he went on, planting his hands on his hips in truculent fashion. "Are you not aware of the persecutions and insults Françoise treats me to? Well, we'll

have breakfast first, and then I'll tell you." And having fortified himself with a bumper or two of Burgundy, he went on. "Only imagine, that this infernal bigot—Oh well," he continued, when Ninon reminded him that she and Françoise were still on terms of friendship, "you can tell her what I say. It is all the same to me, and if my brother-in-law has anything to grumble at in it, let him out with it. Prison? flames and fury! I'll pin my dagger into any of them who dare to lay hand on me, and there you have it. They won't silence me! Head of the family indeed! That's me!—and so much the worse for Louis Dieudonné! taking it into his head to marry my sister! Prudence?" he went on, when his hostess suggested its adoption, "it is the mother of all the vices—a watchword only for cowards. Françoise is my sister, and I'll have them pay me proper respect." Then d'Aubigné, having mercilessly criticised the mature attractions of Françoise, went on to say that he loved her, and if need were, would protect her at the sword's point; but that because she was saintly and surrounded herself with Jesuits, it was no reason why he should be made a monk. Yes, that was her plan. She and the brother-in-law greatly desired that he should shut himself up in St Sulpice, where the livelong day was spent in reading litanies. B-r-r-r-r-t!" shivered 'dAubigné. "Me!" he added, when Santeuil said if he did such a thing, he would excommunicate him—"I would sooner be chopped to mincemeat by the *dragonnades*."

Santeuil suggested that he might prefer entering St Cyr to St Sulpice.

But d'Aubigné replied that the inmates of St Cyr would be too much of his sister's mould for his fancy. Ninon was disturbed at this forcible language, which she had very good reason to believe was not reserved for her ear alone; but that d'Aubigné exploded in much the same fashion in the taverns and the avenues and public gardens, and possibly also even in the galleries of Versailles, where he had access. She took Santeuil aside, and begged him to use his influence in restraining his friend's ebullitions. But Santeuil was in no mind to do anything of the kind; he said it was only just and proper that the widow Scarron, who had not always been a saint, should meet with those little contrarieties, and the matter must settle itself in its own way. Soon after this, Santeuil, who was a great favourite with all the family of the Condés, on account of his wit and gaiety of disposition, was invited to spend the summer at Dijon; and Madame de Maintenon, finding her brother thus unprotected, used every endeavour to persuade him to enter St Sulpice. In any case, however, d'Aubigne said he saw no reason to hurry over the step.

That same year the marriage took place of the Duc du Maine, the eldest son of Madame de Montespan. The bride was neither intelligent or beautiful, but she was huge of frame, and the duke, entertaining a passion for gigantic women, selected her from a trio of ladies, one of whom was adorably

beautiful, and the other rejected one brilliantly gifted and accomplished.

And almost within the days of those marriage festivities at Versailles, la Grande Mademoiselle lay dying in the Luxembourg, and she sent for Mademoiselle de L'Enclos, very much to the surprise of that lady; for the two had not met after the misunderstanding created by the machinations of Madame de Fiesque. Only that morning, it appeared, Madame de Fiesque had made clean acknowledgment to the dying woman of the real facts of the rupture; and now, sorely distressed, she begged Ninon's forgiveness, and to extend it to the far greater offender, Madame de Fiesque herself. Ninon replied that this was freely accorded. Her child was happy in the love of a good man. It was enough; and she turned and held out her hand to Madame de Fiesque, who sat sobbing in a corner of the room. Just at that moment a lady of honour entered, to say that Monsieur de Lauzun was at the door, desiring an interview; but the dying woman refused, entreating that he should not be admitted. "If you but knew, Ninon, how wretched he has made my life," she gasped out. "Oh, I have cruelly expiated all my folly. There was never any bond blessed by Heaven between us. It was no more than a *liaison*. May God forgive me, since my suffering has been so great." And so, two hours later, she died.

The noble traits in the disposition of the daughter of Gaston d'Orléans deserved a happier

fate than to be the tool of a selfish coxcomb like Lauzun, who was, however, himself not destitute of good qualities; but whose best memory stands recorded by the patience and fortitude with which he endured the terrible suffering of a cancer in the mouth, of which he died at the age of more than ninety. The woman whose infatuation for him was so great as to sacrifice the natural dignity which distinguished her, was no ordinary character. Dignified she was, but without pride, and a pleasant and clever conversationalist. True in friendship, gentle and sensible, and incapable of any mean or base action. If sometimes her susceptible, sensitive temperament betrayed her into anger, she would quickly pour balm on the wound she had caused, by gracious and tender words and caresses. She had the courage of a soldier, and would endure fatigue, and face danger as one of the bravest. It is only the fate of ardent, generous souls like hers, if sometimes she was betrayed into the many nets which greed, jealousy and base cunning are always at hand to spread, for rendering nobler natures wretched. Mademoiselle de Montpensier was, in one word, a true descendant of her grandfather, Henri IV.

Lauzun, exiled as he had been, from Versailles, soon after passed over to England, where he contrived to make himself useful by conducting the queen and infant prince of James II. safely to France, during the revolution of '88. Louis, who received the dethroned English king with great demonstration of sympathy and magnificence, and

gave the exiles his palace of St Germains for their home, was thus again brought into direct communication with Lauzun, who, being readmitted to royal favour, was created a duke; but he never really regained the confidence of Louis.

On the occasion of the death of Mademoiselle, he presented himself at the palace, attired in a magnificent mourning cloak. This so angered Louis, that Lauzun ran a parlous risk of once more taking the road to Pignerol.

All that remained of la Grande Mademoiselle's possessions was now proposed to be given to the illegitimate and legitimatized children of the king; but precisely how to deal with Lauzun and his wealth, acquired from Mademoiselle de Montpensier, was not so apparent, since the question still remained open, whether Mademoiselle had been his lawful wife. No one knew for certain, and Madame de Maintenon conceived the ingenious idea of trying to worm the true state of the case from Ninon, whom she knew had been summoned to Mademoiselle's dying bed, feeling persuaded that Mademoiselle de L'Enclos was acquainted with it. She accordingly begged her, in a little note very affectionately worded, to come to Versailles.

Ninon was greatly tempted to reply that if Françoise desired to speak to her, she might be at the trouble of coming to the rue des Tournelles. All circumstances taken into account, and the generosity with which she had treated Françoise's little ways, it did not appear to her that she was bound to wait upon the woman, merely because she

had lighted upon the lucky number in life's lottery. Ninon, however, was but a daughter of Eve. Curiosity was strong to see how Madame Louis Quatorze lived in the lordly pleasure-house, and forthwith she obeyed the summons.

Queen Maria Théresa's surroundings and retinue had been modest enough even to parsimony. Madame Louis Quatorze was attended by a numerous guard, a train of pages, Swiss doorkeepers, and the rest; while her Court and receptions were as magnificent as those of the king. Madame took herself very seriously, and her deportment had become most majestic. To Ninon, however, she unbent, and was simply the Françoise of old times. She led her into her own richly furnished private boudoir, adorned with a curious conglomerate of pictures and statuary, Christian and pagan, where an enormous, life-sized figure of Christ, in carved ivory, was neighboured by painted Jupiters and other Olympian deities, in curiously heterogeneous fashion. There Françoise embraced Ninon with quite a prodigality of affection. Suddenly, however, her manner changed; she congealed into gravity and tones of great solemnity, and Ninon saw the tapestry folds along the wall quiver slightly. It occurred to her that one only, His Majesty Louis XIV., could have any possible right to be present in that most private apartment, and even then she felt the need of putting a strong restraint upon herself and her foot, to prevent it from bestowing a kick upon the tapestry. Then the truth began to come out, the lamentable truth that

Madame and the king were greatly perplexed as to the best mode of dealing with the Duc de Lauzan, whose possessions, made over to him by the Grande Mademoiselle, those, that is to say, which he still held, were much wanted for the king's children. He had so many, as Madame de Maintenon pointed out. That, admitted Ninon, was true enough, "but I will engage, you will not be increasing the number," she added. "What is the point of the question?" It was whether Mademoiselle had really married Monsieur de Lauzun.

The full significance of it all now dawned upon Ninon. Had Mademoiselle not been his wife, it would be a comparatively simple matter to compel a revocation of the gifts which the princess had made him in the course of her life, in order that these should enrich the children of de Montespan. No consideration was yielded to the fact that, be Lauzun what he might, the gifts had been tokens of Mademoiselle's affection for him. Ninon preferred complete inability to afford any trustworthy sort of information on this head, and suggested applying for it to Madame de Fiesque, who might be better instructed: "but," continued Ninon, "supposing Mademoiselle was not his wife, surely to publish the fact, would create a scandal which His Majesty would consider paying too dear a price for the estates of Auvergne and St Fargeau. Either she was Lauzun's wedded wife or—"

Here the chronicle goes on to relate: Mademoiselle de L'Enclos' words were interrupted by a tremendous disturbance at the door, occasioned by

an altercation with the guards, of some person endeavouring to force his way in. The voice was d'Aubigné's, and the next instant he reeled in, far gone in a state of intoxication, and staggering to his sister, he gripped her by the arm and thrust her back into the chair from which she had risen.

This chronicle goes on to relate a terrible scene, over which, for the honour of human nature, some kind of veil may be allowed to hang, lest veracious history has been embroidered by the ample material fact has afforded. The family differences of private domestic relations are frequently unedifying; but when it comes to the base humiliating of a great monarch, one in whose very vices and mistakes grace and virtue had been apparent, until the widow Scarron crossed his path, pen may well refrain from detail, and explain only that the intruder, d'Aubigné, had burst in upon his sister, to reproach her for her treachery in the matter of inducing him to enter St Sulpice. Taking advantage of the absence of his mentor and *alter ego*, Santeuil, she had contrived to trap him by false promises and misrepresentation into the hated place. His liberty for one thing, and of all things prized by d'Aubigné, would not, she had said, be curtailed; it had, however, been so entirely denied him, that when he had attempted to leave, he had been unceremoniously "clapped," as he phrased it, "into a cellar," and he had only escaped by wriggling through an air-grating. To any one possessed of the faintest sense of humour, the notion of making a monk of any sort of this wild harum-scarum would have seemed too preposterous; but

the sense, always so lacking in Françoise d'Aubigné, allowed her to indulge in only too many absurdities whose ending was disastrous; and in any case, the notion of removing the incommoding one from the taverns and cafés and other public resorts where he freely gave utterance to his estimate of Madame Louis Quatorze, and notably of her newly acquired saintliness, was dominant in her, and to be achieved at any cost. She earnestly desired his conversion, possibly if only to silence the hideous music of the ditty, whose refrain he was for ever chanting in the streets, echoed by so many ribald tongues—

"Tu n'as que les restes,
Toi!
Tu n'as que nos restes!"

Since the chronicle goes on to tell that Louis the king was concealed behind the tapestry during the interview of Madame and her old friend Ninon, the appearance of d'Aubigné, with his string of furious reproach, was of course singularly inopportune; and at last the king, unable any longer to restrain his wrath, dashed aside the concealing Gobelins, and white with anger, and his eyes blazing with indignation, ordered the culprit's arrest by the guards, and carrying off to the Bastille. Confounded by the unexpected apparition, d'Aubigné's sober sense returned, and he promised everything required of him with the humblest contrition, adding that if he might suggest the homely proverb in that august presence, there was nothing like washing one's soiled linen at home.

The king's silence yielded consent, and d'Aubigné was permitted to depart from his brother-in-law's presence a free man, on condition of making St Sulpice his headquarters. It was at least preferable to a lodging in one of the Bastille towers, he said, but any restraint or treachery on the part of Françoise, or of Louis, in the way of his coming and going into what he called that black-beetle trap of St Sulpice, would be at once signalised. And thus the difficulty was adjusted, a compromise being effected by appointing a certain Abbé Madot to shadow the ways of d'Aubigné when he took his walks abroad.

But for Ninon the malice of her old friend took on virulence, and it was found later that Françoise charged her with having planned the scandalous scene, in so far as bringing d'Aubigné into it; that she had connived at his coming just at that moment. Yet exactly, except for the king's concealed presence, what overwhelming harm would have ensued, is not apparent, and certainly for that situation, Ninon could not have been responsible. Henceforth all shadow of friendship between the two women died out, and enmity and bitterness were to supervene when opportunity should be ripe.

CHAPTER XXIV

The Falling of the Leaves—Gallican Rights—"The Eagle of Meaux"—Condé's Funeral Oration—The Abbé Gedouin's Theory—A Bag of Bones—Marriage and Sugar-plums—The Valour of Monsieur du Maine—The King's Repentance—The next Campaign—La Fontaine and Madame de Sablière—MM. de Port Royal—The Fate of Madame Guyon—"Mademoiselle Balbien."

And time passed on—passed on. The brilliant century was in its sere and yellow leaf, and one of the best and most amiable of the glorious band, le Nôtre, the gardener *par excellence*, faded and died, to the great grief of Louis, who dearly loved his company, and would walk by his chair in the garden of Versailles, when the invalid's limbs had failed him. Ninon keenly felt the loss of the kindly friend, who had been one of the party to Rome with Santeuil—who had nearly missed the papal benediction on his hymns, as he always believed, by his witticisms about the carp. And now the good canon was to die, victim of a practical joke on the part of the young Duc de Condé, who amused himself with emptying the contents of his snuff-box into his guest's glass of champagne. Unawares, Santeuil drained the glass; and the hideous concoction produced a fit of such convulsive sickness, that he died of it. Bitterly enough Condé repented, but that did not bring back his friend.

About the time that the zenith of Louis's power was attained, when his very name was uttered on the bated breath of admiration, hatred and terror—and the yoke of the widow Scarron had not yet entangled him—and while the Doge of Genoa was compelled by Duquesne to sue for mercy at the feet of the French monarch—accused of complicity with the pirates of the Mediterranean—the Court of Rome was compelled to yield to the demands of the Church in France, in the matter of the *régale*. This right, which had ever been the strength and mainstay of religious Catholic independence in France, had fallen in later days somewhat into abeyance; and when, some nine years earlier, it had been put into active force again, the pope opposed it. To establish it on a firm footing was the work of Bossuet, who set forth and substantiated with the bishops of the dioceses of France the existing constitution of the Gallican Church under the ruling of the four famous articles: 1. That ecclesiastical power had no hold upon the temporal government of princes. 2. That a General Council was superior to the pope. 3. That the canons could regulate apostolical power and general ecclesiastical usage. 4. That the judgment of the Sovereign Pontiff is only infallible after the universal and general consent of the Church.

The pope and the Court of Rome had no choice but finally to accept these propositions; but unpalatable as they were, they came between the worse evil threatening Catholic Unity, of a schism such as it had suffered in England under Elizabeth and Henry.

The splendid gifts of Bossuet place his memory on a lasting and lofty eminence, as it placed him, living, in distinguished positions, Bishop of Meaux, preacher at the Louvre, preceptor to the Dauphin. From his profound theological learning welled forth the splendid eloquence which thrilled the vast assemblages flocking to drink in his orations. One of the most magnificent among these was that at the obsequies of the great Condé, beginning—

"Cast your gaze around; see all that magnificence and piety has endeavoured to do, to render honour to the hero: titles, inscriptions, vain records of what no longer exists, the weeping figures around the tomb and fragile images of a grief which Time, with all the rest, will bear away with it, columns which appear to lift to high heaven their magnificent testimony to him who is gone; and nothing is lacking in all this homage but him to whom it is given. . . . For me, if it is permitted to join with the rest in rendering the last duties beside your tomb, O Prince! noble and worthy subject of our praise and of our regrets, you will live eternally in my memory. I shall see you always, not in the pride of victory . . . but as you were in those last hours under God's hand, when His glory was breaking on you. It is thus I shall see you yet more greatly triumphing than at Fribourg and at Rocroi . . . And in the words of the best-beloved disciple, I shall give thanks and say—'The true victory is that which overcometh the world—even our faith.'"

A noble purity of spirit and deep conviction inspired Bossuet's eloquence. His knowledge was limited by his Jesuit training, though he studied anatomy at a later period, by the king's desire, in order to instruct the Dauphin in the science; but

with science generally and physics he was unacquainted. As a Jesuit he was opposed to Jansenism and the Port-Royalists; but for long the gentle piety of Fénelon retained the respect and admiration of Bossuet's more fiery spirit. Both these great men gave instruction at St Cyr, by the desire of Madame de Maintenon and the king.

Time must indeed have passed lightly by Ninon; for once again, at the age of eighty years, she inspired a young abbé, named Gedouin—a distant relative on the maternal side—with deep fervent admiration. Ninon at first believed that he was jesting with her, and rebuked him severely; but it was a very serious matter on his part, and though she told him of her fourscore years, he declared that it in no way altered his sentiments. "What of that?" he said; "wit and beauty know nothing of age," and the Abbé Gedouin's pleading, which was not in vain, terminated Ninon's last *liaison* with an affectionate and endearing friendship. When he was rallied on his conquest, the abbé's rejoinder was that—

> "Ah, mes amis, lorsqu'une tonne
> A contenu d'excellent vin,
> Elle garde un parfum divin
> Et la lie en est toujours bonne."

Monsieur de Lauzun, on the other hand, being now over sixty years old, contracted a marriage with an English girl of sixteen. She was so fearfully thin, that the Duc de St Simon, who was one of Mademoiselle de L'Enclos' *cercle*, said de Lauzun might as well have wedded all the bones of the Holy

Innocents Cemetery, where the skulls and bones were piled in pyramids.

St Simon was a delightful conversationalist. He was the son of the old favourite of Louis XIII. He could be very caustic with his anecdotes. One night he greatly amused the company with an account of the marriage of the son of the Grand Dauphin, the little Duke of Burgundy. He was of the tender age when ordinary and everyday little boys are occasionally still liable to chastisement by their elders. The duchess to be, who was still very fond of her doll, was presented on the occasion by the Queen of England with a very elegantly trimmed shift, handed to her by the maids of honour on a magnificently enamelled tray. In this garment she was attired, while her youthful husband, seated on a footstool, was undressed in the presence of the king and of all the Court. The bride, being put to bed, the Duc of Burgundy was conducted in and also put into bed, beside which the Grand Dauphin then took his seat, while Madame de Lude took her place beside the young duchess. Then sugar-plums were offered to the bride and bridegroom, who cracked them up with the greatest enjoyment. After about a quarter of an hour, the duc was taken out of bed again, a proceeding which appeared greatly to displease him, and he was led, sulking enough, back to the antechamber, where the Duc de Berry, some two years his junior, clapping him on the shoulder, told him he was not a bit of a man. "If it had been me," he added, "I should have refused to get out of bed."

The king imposed silence on the little rascal's

rebellious counsel, and placed the bridegroom back into the hands of his tutors, declaring that he would not permit him to so much as kiss the tips of his wife's fingers, for the next five years to come. "Then, grandpapa," demanded the little brother, "why have you let them be married? It is ridiculous." It was all certainly something like it.

After that the child was placed for his instruction in the care of the Abbé de Fénelon, whose rapid advancement at Court had been attained by his lofty character and talents.

But Louis had far more affection for his illegitimate children than for these, and aided by Madame de Maintenon's intrigues, he finally succeeded in securing a large portion of the heritage of la Grande Mademoiselle for the Duc du Maine and the Duc du Vendôme; but the brave spirit of heroes and conquerors he could not endow them with, for all his desire. It was to no effect that he confided command to them of his troops in Holland. The Duc du Maine specially undistinguished himself. Just as the enemy was escaping scot-free, he found he was hungry, and asked for a cup of bouillon to strengthen him. "Charge! Charge, Monseigneur!" urged Villeroy's messenger, coming to him in a fever of excitement.

"Oh, well, patience," replied the warrior; "my wing is not in order yet."

Finding no sort of response to his repeated messages, Villeroy went in search himself of the prince, and found him in his tent, at his confessor's knees. The first duty of a good Christian, he said, was to make his peace at such times with Heaven.

So the religious discipline of his governess and stepmother, the widow Scarron and Madame de Maintenon, had borne fruit. It was of a different flavour from the prayer of the brave servant of King Charles I.—Sir Edmund Verney—before Edgehill: "Lord, Thou knowest how busy I must be this day. If I forget Thee, do not Thou forget me." And there was no battle won or lost that day on the Dutch frontier, and Louis, when they brought to Versailles news of the enemy's safe retreat, was at a loss to understand the situation; for no one cared, or dared, to tell him the truth, until Lavienne, his *valet de chambre* in chief, in the days of Louis's amours, hazarded the observation that, after all, proverbs could speak falsely, and that "Good blood *could* lie;" and then he went on to add the other truths concerning Monsieur du Maine. In the face of the fulsome praise following in the journals—which lied as only journals know how—the king was overwhelmed with grief and chagrin; and, beside himself, he broke his cane in a fit of anger on the back of one of an unlucky servant, whom he happened to detect surreptitiously eating a bit of marchpane. This ebullition, creating the consternation of all the Court, just sitting down to dinner, brought Madame Louis Quatorze and Père la Chaise upon the scene. "Parbleu, mon père," said the king, gradually regaining his senses, "I have just chastised a wretched creature who greatly merited it."

"Ah!" gasped tbe confessor.

"And I have broken my cane on his back. Have I offended God?"

"No, my son, no," replied the holy man. "It is merely that the excitement may be harmful to your precious health."

Fortunately the cane, being of slenderest rosewood, had easily snapped.

Before the end of the next campaign, the redoubtable Duc du Maine was recalled: d'Elbœuf hastened to say to him, making a profound bow, "Have the goodness, Monseigneur, to inform me where you propose entering on the next campaign."

The duke turned, smiling, and extended his hand to d'Elbœuf, whose ironical tones he had failed to perceive.

"Wherever it is," added d'Elbœuf, "I should wish to be there."

"Why?" demanded the duke.

"Because," replied d'Elbœuf, after a silence, "at least one's life would be safe."

Monsieur du Maine gave a jump, as if he had trodden on a serpent, and went away without replying, not being better furnished with wit than he was with valour.

And the autumn leaves of Ninon's life were ever fast falling around her. In her Château de Boulogne Madame de la Sablière passed away, and la Fontaine, finding life a sad thing without her, quickly followed her.

The Jesuit conception of religious faith, great as were its merits as originated in the mind of Loyola, theoretically, and in its code drawn up by his gifted successor, Lainez, had displayed its imperfections

in its practical working, as time passed. This was more apparent in France even than elsewhere on the Continent; since there papal authority was tempered by regulations which afforded wider scope to thoughtful and devout minds ever occupied by the problem of final salvation and its attainment.

> "Two such opposed foes encamp them still
> In man as well as herbs, grace and rude will,"

says Friar Lawrence, musing over his "osier cage," of weeds and flowers. There had been no time on Christian record that the question had not exercised theologians, and when it had burnt into fuller flame, fanned by the ardent soul of Luther, it spread through Europe and was called the Reformation; but the spirit of it had been ever present in the Church, and to endeavour to stamp out the Catholic faith had, in Luther's earlier days at all events, formed no part of his desire. Yet scarcely had his doctrines formulated, than the fanaticism and extravagance of the ignorant and irresponsible seized upon them, and wrung them out of all size and proportion to fit their own wild lusts and inclinations, "stumbling on abuse," striving to impose their levelling and socialistic views, an establish a community of goods, and all else in common—even their wives, though dispensing with clothing as a superfluity and a vanity displeasing in Heaven's sight. So Anabaptism ran riot in Germany under John of Leyden and his disciples; while upon its heels Calvin's gloomy and hopeless tenets kept men's minds seething in doubt and

speculation over grace and free-will, his narrow creed and private enmity bringing Servetus to hideous and prolonged torture and death at the stake, for heresy.

Stirred by the revolt of Protestantism on one side, and the claims of Rome on the other, supported by the Jesuits, speculation gained increased activity within the pale of the Catholic Church, animated further by the writings of Jansenius, Bishop of Ypres, whose theories on grace and the efficacy of good works were grounded mainly on the *viâ media*, and it was the following of his opinions by the illustrious students gathered at Port Royal which created the school of Jansenists that included such names as Fénelon, Pascal, and so many others, headed by the Abbé Arnauld, whose sister Angélique was the Superior of the convent of Port Royal, and whose father, the learned advocate, had been so stern an opponent to the Jesuits as to have caused their expulsion from France in the reign of Henri IV. Readmitted later, they found as firm an opponent in his son, who, when still quite young, wrote a brilliant treatise against the danger of Jesuit casuistry.

The convent of Port Royal des Champs was situated on the road from Versailles to Chevreuse, and hard by, in a farmhouse called La Grange, "Messieurs de Port Royal," as the Jansenist priests and students were called, made their home. They had for their friends the most distinguished men, scholars and poets of the time; Boileau, Pascal, Racine were of the band. The place itself is now scarcely

more than a memory. It was then, wrote Madame de Sévigné, "*Tout propre à inspirer le désir de faire son salut*," and hither came many a high-born man and woman of the world to find rest and peace. Now a broken *tourelle* or two, the dovecote and a solitary Gothic arch reflecting in a stagnant pool, are all that remain in the sequestered valley, of the famous Port Royal, which early in the next century was destroyed by royal decree, when its glory had departed, following the foreordained ruling of all mundane achievement; and the extravagance of the *convulsionnaires* and later followers of Jansenism was stamped out by the bull "*Unigenitus*" against heresy.

Arnauld's heart was deposited at Port Royal at his death, with the remains of his mother and sisters. Louis XIV., as ever his wont had been to genius and intellect, had invited him "to employ his golden pen in defence of religion;" but that was before the great king came under the direction of Madame de Maintenon and Père la Chaise. But that Madame and her Jesuit confessor would long continue to regard the Port Royalists with favour was not possible. Intolerance succeeded to patronage, and Fénelon was deported to Cambrai, sent afar from his friend, Madame Guyon, whose order of arrest and incarceration in the Château de Vincennes was issued very shortly after Mademoiselle de L'Enclos' interview with Madame Louis Quatorze in her Versailles sanctum.

In her dismay, Madame Guyon contrived to fly to Ninon, seeking protection; but it was of no avail.

Without a moment's delay, Ninon drove to Versailles, and sought an interview with Madame de Maintenon on behalf of Madame Guyon. The interview was not accorded. Nanon—the Nanon of Scarron days, but now "Mademoiselle Balbien"—was delegated to speak with her.—"Mademoiselle Balbien," who gave Ninon to understand that she was to be addressed no longer as "*tu*" ("thou"), but as "*vous*" ("you"), that the question of Madame Guyon could not even be entered upon, and under threat of being herself again lodged in the *Répenties* she was bidden to depart.

Ninon was at first amazed at this strange reception and insolent behaviour of mistress and maid. But she was not left long in perplexity, since "Mademoiselle Balbien" permitted the truth to escape her prim lips, that Madame de Maintenon had credited Ninon with the design of introducing d'Aubigné into the boudoir in the middle of that memorable interview, with the intention of disgracing Madame in the estimation of the king. That Ninon was not made of the stuff for this, it is almost superfluous to say. Any sins she might have to answer for, did not include the hypocrisy with which Madame de Maintenon had clothed herself about, and almost equally needless is it to repeat that by no possible means the concealed presence of the king could have been known by any but the two most immediately concerned. It could be but a matter of their dual consciousness.

For six years Madame Guyon remained in prison. Monsieur Fénelon's *Maximes des Saints* was con-

demned by the Court of Rome, and the bigotry and hypocrisy ruling Versailles swelled daily.

Molière, alas! was no more, to expose the perilous absurdities and lash them to extinction; but the comedy of *La Fausse Prude*, produced some weeks later at the Italiens, was a prodigious success. The world greatly enjoyed and admired the fitting of the cap, built upon the framework supplied by one who had befriended and sheltered under her own roof the forlorn young orphan girl, Françoise d'Aubigné.

CHAPTER XXV

The Melancholy King—The Portents of the Storm—The Ambition of Madame Louis Quatorze—The Farrier of Provence—The Ghost in the Wood—Ninon's Objection—The King's Conscience—A Dreary Court—Racine's Slip of the Tongue—The Passing of a Great Poet, and a Busy Pen Laid Down.

THE disastrous thrall holding Louis XIV. to Madame de Maintenon, was an endless theme of wonder and speculation among his subjects. Very few of them ascribed it to pure unadulterated love and affection for his old wife—for she was his elder by three years—while Louis himself was now at an age when the enthusiasm of life slows into some weariness and languor as it recognises the emptiness and futility of all mundane things. There were times when he was lost in brooding thought, and he would wander about his splendid galleries and salons and magnificent gardens, absorbed, if his dull aspect expressed the inward spirit, in melancholy reflection. The glory had departed of his earlier ruling, leaving the nation loaded with debt. The price had to be paid for those brilliant victories of long ago, and accumulation of debt on the many later reverses cried for settlement. The provinces had been deeply impoverished by the absenteeism of their overlords, whose presence the Grand Monarque had for so many years required to grace Versailles, attired in their silks and velvets, sweeping their plumed, diamond-aigretted hats to the polished

floors, bowing and crowding to gaze at the sublime process of His Majesty's getting up, promenading with the great ladies among the fountains and bosquets of Trianon, spending the heaven-bestowed hours in the sweetness of doing nothing but manipulate their rapier-hangers and snuff-boxes; while Jacques Bonhomme, away down in Touraine and Perigord and Berri, and where you will in the length and breadth of fair France, was sweating and starving to keep those high-born gentlemen supplied with money in their purses for the card-tables, and to maintain their lackeys and gilded coaches in the sumptuous style which was no more than Louis required of the vast throng. It was in its way an unavoidable exaction, since the few of the nobility who remained on their own estates had done so at the peril of incurring the severe displeasure of the king, the Sun-King—*Le roi le veut*—whose centre was Versailles.

And still the full time was not yet when all this should be changed. Even for Louis, the absolute reckoning day was but shadowing in. "After us the deluge": that prophetic utterance was spoken long after Louis was borne to his rest in St Dénis, but when the records of his life tell of those long-brooding, silent pacings amid the grandeur and treasures of his splendid palace, comes the question if from afar off there did not sound the murmur of the flood that was to break some hundred years hence, if in some dim yet certain way the cloud no bigger than a man's hand was not apparent to his introspective gaze,

for as yet the domestic misfortunes of his latest years had not befallen, death had not robbed him of his heir, and the rest dear to him; but discontent, not unmingled with contempt, seethed round the proud King of France. How were the mighty fallen, and how great the political mistake which indissolubly linked the ambitious woman, clothed about in her new-found meretricious garb of piety, with his great responsible destiny—Louis, Dieudonné and elect ruler.

Nor did it stop at the secret, sufficiently open and acknowledged, of his marriage with Scarron's widow. The fear was well enough founded that she was moving earth, and if possible all heaven, to be Queen of France; but righteousness had small part in the endeavour, and trickery and chicanery failed to prevail to this crowning end upon the king's consciousness and conviction. Pride, and the sense of his irrevocable bondage, mingled with the poison of the hypocritical devoutness instilled into him by his wife and her confessor, kept him silently deferential to this woman, spoiled by prosperity; but she herself says that all her endeavours to amuse him or bring a smile to his lips, failed. He had—mildly construing the homely proverb—put off from shore with a person—more or less mentionable—and he was bound to sail to land with her.

The *diablerie* at work was untiring, and had many strings, and there seem, small, if any, question that to the genius of the Marseilles merchant's wife, formerly Madame Arnoul, the curious tale of the Farrier of Provence is due.

From extreme southward of France came this poor man, who said he was shoemaker to all the horses of his grace, Monsieur d'Épernon, at his country mansion near Marseilles — to speak to the king's Majesty upon a subject concerning him alone.

The major of the guards to whom he explained his wish, told him such an interview was impossible. A letter of audience was first required, and that was to be had only with utmost difficulty. Besides, he added, the king did not receive all the world. The man objected that he was not all the world. "Quite so," said the guard. "By whom are you sent?"

"By Heaven."

"Ah!"—and all the bodyguard went into fits of laughter at this reply. The man stoutly insisted, however, that he had most important matters to disclose to "the Master of 'Vesàilles,'" as he phrased it. At this point of the conversation, the Marshal de Torcy, Colbert's nephew, happened to come by. Overhearing what had passed, he directed that this emissary of Heaven should be conducted to the ministers, just then sitting in council. They, impressed with the honest and earnest air of the farrier, informed the king of the affair. Listening with grave attention to their representation, Louis commanded the man to be brought before him. Alone with the king, the farrier unfolded his tale. It was fantastic enough. He was returning, he said, from the duke's stables, where he had been shoeing some of the horses—to his own home, in a

hamlet situated not far off, and was passing through a wood. It was night, and quite dark; but suddenly he found himself enfolded in a brilliant light, and in the midst of it stood a tall woman, right in his path. She addressed him by his name, and bade him repair immediately and without an instant of delay to Versailles, where he was to tell the king that he had seen the spirit of the dead queen, his wife, and that she, the ghost of Maria Théresa, commanded him in the name of heaven, to make public the marriage he had contracted, which hitherto he had kept secret.

The king objected that the man had probably been the victim of hallucination. "I thought so too at first," replied the farrier, "and I sat down under an elm-tree to collect myself, believing I had been dreaming; but two days afterwards, as I was passing the same spot, I again saw the phantom, who threatened all sorts of terrible misfortunes to me and mine if I did not immediately do what it had directed."

Then the king had another doubt; and asked him whether he was not trying to impose upon him, and had been paid to carry out the affair.

The man replied that in order for His Majesty to be convinced that he was no impostor, he should wish him to reply to one question he had to ask. "Have you," he went on, when the king willingly consented to this, "have you ever mentioned to living soul a syllable about the midnight visit the late queen-mother paid you in the Château de Ribeauvillé years ago?"

"No," said Louis, with paling lips, "I never confided it to anyone."

"Very well; the ghost in the forest bade me remind you of that visit, if you expressed any doubt of my good faith; and," added the man, as the king said it was very strange, "before disappearing, the tall white woman uttered these words—'He must obey me now, as he then obeyed his mother.'"

The king, in an access of dismay and perplexity, sent for the Duc de Duras, and related to him in confidence what had passed during the interview with the peasant. The duke, who was an intimate friend of Ninon, told her the wondrous tale.

It took no time for her to arrive at the conclusion that Madame Louis Quatorze and her faithful card-divining friend and fortune-teller, Madame Arnoul, were at the bottom of the business, and under promise on the duke's part of inviolable secrecy, she told him of the adventure in the Vosges and the very conspicuous part she had played in it, actuated by her enmity towards the de Montespan. The farrier, she did not doubt, was honest enough; but, simple and credulous, he had been made the tool of the two women—an easy prey to Madame Arnoul, who, living at Marseilles, had seen him, and reckoned him up as suitable for her design.

The duke was of opinion that there was no doubt Ninon's solution of the mystery was correct, and he added that, this being the case, it was her duty to inform the king of it—"For who knows," said Duras, "that he may not be weak enough to obey the

ghost's behests, and disgrace himself and his throne in the eye of all Europe and the universe, by seating the Maintenon upon it." It was a most serious matter—most serious.

Ninon, however, shrank from the suggestion. She was a woman of courage; but recent experience had taught her the lengths of malice to which her old friend Françoise could go, and she had no mind to measure weapons with her again. To make clean confession of the affair to the king, was simply to bring down upon herself all the thunderbolts of the hatred of the woman whose ingenuity was never at fault in plausibility, and the finding the way to retain the king's good graces at no matter what cost to anyone.

Ninon saw a far better plan than sacrificing herself for the destruction of the scheme. She begged the duke not to compromise her to the king; but to represent to him the advisability of sending competent and trusted persons to the Ribeauvillé château, accompanied by the duke himself, and there to sound and search the recesses and panelling of the haunted room and the adjacent one she indicated, and little more would be necessary to prove to His Majesty that he had been duped.

The journey taken, and the search made, the emissaries duly returned. Their report fully satisfied the king that he had been victimised, by some person or persons unknown, in the gloomy old mansion—and his marriage with Madame de Maintenon was not then or ever publicly and officially proclaimed. If he had any suspicions of her com-

plicity, he made no sign of them; either he thought her incapable of using such base means of attaining the desired end, or, on the other hand, he was indulgent to the not unnatural desire to see published the fact of the honour he had bestowed on her. At all events, calm and serene, outwardly dignified, unruffled, Madame Louis Quatorze dwelt on at Versailles, in the odour of all the sanctimoniousness and decorum the coming of herself and of Père la Chaise had imparted to the vast place.

Well endowed personally and mentally, and amiably disposed, Louis was admirably fitted by nature to represent the beloved and worshipped king who had maintained the spiritual liberties of his Protestant subjects, when he himself became a Catholic —since, as he had said, "*Paris vaut une Messe.*" But though his naturally grand deportment and the conviction of his own semi-divinity and sense of great-doing had wrought Louis to brilliant achievements for the State, apart from the glories of the battlefield, it is more than conceivable that he was fully conscious of his own inadequate education and rearing, to which Mazarin's policy had limited him. Beneath all the magnificent assumption, the common sense and inner consciousness of Louis were not likely to fail, as time passed, to show him that he was but a cipher in the scheme of the universe, an atom; and under the theological direction of his Jesuit confessor, an exaggerated estimate of his own sinfulness and imperfections crushed him into melancholy and self-surrender, till he actually and honestly imagined that eternal punishment

threatened, unless he humbled himself, as he did to the dust, to follow the instruction of his Jesuit confessor. Yet Madame de Maintenon herself laments that "she could never make him understand that humility was a Christian virtue." *À qui la faute?* His most intimate exemplar of the attribute was one more outwardly shining than profound. There have been apologists for Madame de Maintenon, and for Père la Chaise, and for these promoters of the Nantes Revocation they do not seem to be superfluous, these "*Pièces Justificatives*," of the *gouvernante* of the Montespan's children, and later of their father. The Duc de St Simon, among many other writers, makes less than no extenuation; while, on the other hand, he describes Père la Chaise as a strong Jesuit, yet withal neither fanatical nor fawning—and yet more powerfully still in his favour, he says that although he advised the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes, he was no party to the merciless persecution by which it was followed.

Forgetting, or rather ignoring, his own youth, Louis imposed rigorous discipline upon all about him. The merest peccadillo incurred possibilities of imprisonment, and only absolute impeccability being tolerated, pharisaism and hypocrisy were rampant. The royal children and grandchildren were required, on pain of utter disgrace, to make weekly confession, and no choice of a spiritual director was permitted the Grand Dauphin. To Père la Chaise, and to him alone, was committed the conscience of the Jansenist Fénelon's pupil; and at

the great annual festivals of the Church, all the members of the royal family were required to communicate publicly. The Duchess of Burgundy was sorely rebuked for a breach of this regulation.

The consideration and deference often only meagrely accorded to Queen Maria Théresa, was never lacking to Louis's morganatic wife. One day, at the camp of Compiègne, on the occasion of a mock siege, the king stood hat in hand, for more than an hour beside her carriage door, explaining to her the manœuvres of the troops. Any reference not entirely and absolutely complimentary to Madame Louis Quatorze, or to anything connected with her past life, would rouse him to violent anger. It would have seemed that the two went in mortal fear of each other.

Such a slip of the tongue helped to bring about the disgrace of Racine. He had long been admitted on an intimate friendly footing with the royal family, and having in mind a wish to write a history of the reign of Louis XIV., he was in the habit of bringing his notes on the projected work to read to Madame de Maintenon. His honest and veracious nature would have been untrue to itself if he had failed to animadvert on the defectiveness of the system of administration in regard to the people, burdened and suffering as they were under heavy taxation, resulting from prodigality in high places, and the enormous expenses of the wars, which, glorious as they were, spelt ruin for the general population. The sympathy and pity of Madame de Maintenon

were genuinely and deeply stirred by the eloquent word-picture the poet had drawn of this; and she suggested that he should draw up a memoir of what he thought could be done for alleviating the widespread misery and distress. Upon this memoir Racine fell to work, and when completed, he first submitted it for Madame's perusal; but, unfortunately, Louis entering at the moment, glanced his eye over the manuscript, and his wrath kindled. "As Monsieur Racine could make excellent verses, he fancied that he knew everything," he said. "Not content with being a great poet, he must needs imagine he could be a minister of State," and wrathfully frowning, the king went out. And in addition to this offence, Racine had stumbled on the almost more heinous crime of stirring up the memory of Scarron. Louis, in course of discussion with Racine on the cause of the decadence of comedy, or, rather, the diminution of the favour with which it had come to be regarded, expressed wonder that this should be the case.

"Sire," said Racine, "there are several causes. Since Molière's death, no comedy-writer seems, if he exists, to have dared to enter his field, and the actors have no material. One cannot always play Molière; and lacking other plays, they find refuge in the detestable pieces of Scarron, and—"

But Racine never finished that comment. The words froze on his lips, and silenced by the scarlet flush on Madame de Maintenon's face, and the uncontrollable trembling of the king, as if some reptile

had stung him, Racine, recognising his blunder, stammered out some words which only made things worse. The whilom wife of the criticised dead play-writer cast furious glances at the tragic poet, while Louis said, in tones seething with anger—"I have recently seen certain scribbled comments of yours, Monsieur, in which you make an attempt to account for the misery suffered by the people during my rule. Poets are generally wretched statesmen, and, moreover, we do not permit criticism, direct or indirect upon our authority. Ah," he added, when again Racine strove to defend himself, "no excuses. Remain at home for the future; and direct the course of your studies into other channels."

So Racine received his dismissal from Versailles, and soon after, taking his disgrace to heart, the melancholy, long stolen over him from ill health, increased, and aggravated the cruel disease to which he succumbed after an operation conducted by the unskilful physician who attended him. The king's heart softened towards him during those last days, and he was constantly sending messengers to inquire after him. Racine was interred in the cemetery of the place to which his heart had so warmly attached itself—Port Royal; but after the destruction of the monastery and the Grange, some twelve years later, his remains were transferred to Paris, and laid in the church of St Étienne du Mont, beside those of Pascal; and Louis bestowed a pension of 2000 livres on his widow, and a reversion of it to her children, till the death of the last of them.

In the death of Madame de Sévigné, Ninon lost another friend. The troops of enthusiastic admirers of this most delightful woman and letter-writer would render further endeavour in the way of eulogy trite and superfluous. To know her in life must have been to experience an extraordinary satisfaction; but the content is left to know her through that flow of correspondence—the voluminous letters touching upon every conceivable topic of contemporary interest. From descriptions of Court life and its glitter and splendour, to the hideous details recorded of the prisoner Brinvilliers, or the terrible tragedy of the Brittany gentleman in the ballroom, or the skilful gamester, Dangeau, or Picard, the Paris footman who wouldn't make hay. "He was not engaged," he said, "for such work. It was none of his business—the silly fellow. If you see him, don't welcome him; don't protect him; and don't blame me. Only look upon him as of all the servants in the world the least addicted to hay-making."

"It is the same with her," says one English commentator. "From the first letter quoted, to the last; from the proud and merry boasting of the young mother with a boy, to the candid shudder about the approach of old age, and the refusal of Death to grant a moment to the dying statesman Louvois—'No, not a single moment.' She loved nature and truth without misgiving, and nature and truth loved her in return, and have crowned her with glory and honour."[1]

[1] Leigh Hunt.

CHAPTER XXVI

Leaving the Old Home—"Wrinkles"—Young Years and Old Friends—"A Bad Cook and a Little Bit of Hot Coal"—Voltaire—*Irène*—Making a Library—"Adieu, Mes Amis"—The Man in Black.

THE dawn of the new century did not find Mademoiselle de L'Enclos in the old home of the rue des Tournelles. One by one the relentless scythe of Death had cut down all the illustrious men and women of Ninon's time. The *cercle* had narrowed, the music and wit and joyousness the walls of that salon had so long echoed with, were silent. If Ninon touched her lute now, it could but stir regret and sadness for the void. At last, she tells, her beauty had faded, leaving no traces of it; yet much of the old animation, and even not a little of the *gaieté du cœur*, were with her still. The empty salon, and the "yellow chamber" and the Place Royale itself, once echoing with the footsteps of her best friends, must have only deepened her regrets. Of all the friends left her in Paris, there were but two as old, one indeed older than herself—Mademoiselle de Scudéri. The other lady, Madame de Sandwich, somewhere of the same age, ever *grande dame*, sweet and amiable, and coquette to the last, in the beautiful old *point de Venise* and paduasoy silks she adorned herself with.

Both these ladies occupied apartments in the

faubourg St Germain, and, desiring to be nearer to them, Mademoiselle de L'Enclos disposed of her house in the rue des Tournelles, and took up her residence upon the quay, in a house facing the Tuileries. The trio, enjoying their old terms of friendship, interchanged visits, and dined together, and chatted, sometimes sighing in unison over the irrevocable delights of the past. Mademoiselle de Scudéri best preserved her cheery outlook upon the world; but, to be sure, as Ninon says, never having been beautiful, she had had the least to lose; for age could not rob her of her mental charms and delightful wit and fancy. "Time is a coward," she said one day; "he only flings his wrinkles, as the Parthians flung their arrows, as they flew by."

One day, as the three were together, the message of the gentle lady's recall came; and they laid her on a couch, and sent for the medical aid which was not likely to avail much for the ninety-four years. "Dry your tears," she murmured on the last breath. "Soon it will be your turn, and in a better world we shall find again our young years, and our old friends."

Yet another pleasant acquaintance shared those twilight days for Mademoiselle de L'Enclos, never weary of kindly interest and well-doing where she could bestow it. Fortunately for posterity, Ninon was afflicted with an atrociously bad cook, and she was often obliged to go into her kitchen and attend personally to the sauces and the *rôtis*, and the rest. One day she was busily engaged in putting together a partridge pasty for the enter-

tainment of her two friends, who were coming to *déjeuner* with her.

Suddenly the kitchen door opened, and a little boy of some seven to eight years old entered, with intelligent eyes, and a bright smile on his clean-cut features. Taking off his cap, he said in the politest of tones—"Will you please give me a few cinders, Madame, since your fire is alight? Our servant upstairs there has let our fire go out, and papa forbids me to go to school until I have eaten my soup."

Ninon wondered who this little son of a most wise papa might be. He was a small child for going to college, as he told her on further question, was that of the Jesuit College of Clermont. Then, putting facts together, she had scarcely need to ask his name; though on questioning him further still, he told her it was François Marie Arouet.

"The son of the treasurer Arouet, of the Court of Accounts—and you live on the floor above mine, do you not?"

"That is so, Madame," nodded the boy, repeating his request, for he was in fear of the professor's wrath if he should be late.

"But you have nothing to put your fire in," said Ninon.

"Ah! how stupid of me," said the child, as he stooped down, and gathered a handful of the cold ashes. "Please put the hot coals on this," he went on, holding out the cinder-shielded palms.

So that was the little lad of whom her friend, the Abbé de Châteauneuf had spoken as the un-

usually intelligent child of nobly born, but poor parents, who were great friends of his. "Bravo!" Ninon had said to him, as he departed with the fire in his hands, "you will be a clever man one of these days,"—and the sparks of that fire kindled to a flame of celebrity which is not likely to die out while the French language or any modern tongue finds expression.

"You will stifle me with roses," said he, when, on the representation of his *Irène* in the winter-time, seventy-eight years later, the acclaiming crowds did him homage. The excitement was too great for him, and in the following May he died. A long life full of literary activity and of extremes of malice and generosity, stirred by the environment of the ferment of bigotry and philosophy seething in the society of the eighteenth century. Very early in his career the young pupil of Clermont, taking his family name of Voltaire, showed signs of being no model Jesuit. For the rest, it needs to recall only the memory of Ninon's youthful protégé by his fatherly care of the grand-niece of Corneille, when he heard she was in dire need, or his defence of the unhappy Calvinist Calas, accused of the murder of his son, prompted by religious conviction, and judicially murdered by being broken on the wheel. In the face of this terrible injustice, Voltaire never rested till he had obtained such reparation for Calas' afflicted family as money could bestow, from the public treasury of Toulouse, through the influence of the Duc de Choiseul.

The acquaintance begun in Ninon's kitchen continued on a very pleasant footing, and in her will she bequeathed him two thousand francs with which to begin forming himself a library.

And so, in serenity and calm enjoyment of the society of the few friends time had left her of the old years, and of those the present had brought her, and in acts of generous charity among her poorer neighbours and to those who should live after, Ninon de L'Enclos passed away. "It is almost sweet to die," she said, re-echoing the sentiment of those dear to her who had gone before, "for there in the other world we shall meet again those we have loved."

And watching by her couch, they heard her murmur—"Adieu, my friends, adieu," and the faint breath ceased.

"Qu'un vain espoir ne vienne pas s'offrir
Que puisse ébranler mon courage,
Je suis en age de mourir,
Que-ferais-je davantage!"

So, in his own poetic fancy, St Evrémond seemed to hear her say; for heart and soul he knew her, and understood her. It was in one of her letters to him, towards the close of her life, that she expresses regret for what it had pleased her to designate her "philosophy." "Had anyone told me in those young days of mine I should live such a life, I should have hanged myself sooner," she writes.

One distinguished biographer, prefacing her

letters to the Marquis de Sévigné, testifies to the consideration in which she was regarded by the personages of high merit and rank, who held themselves honoured to be admitted to her intimacy and friendship.

And the same biographer goes on to tell of the wonderful tale of such sort as is apt to cling to persons of celebrity, or more or less apart from the rank and file of people—the tale of the "*Noctambule*," Ninon's nocturnal visitant, the little "Man in Black"; but this is confirmed and best told in the vivid description of his last visit, as it is handed down to us—

"PARIS, *9th April* 1701.

. . . . . .

"Ah! my friend, what a terrible fright I have had! Truly I am not recovered from it yet, and my limbs still tremble at the thought of it. Oh, these cruel things that return from the past at intervals, to stare you in the face, and poison the tranquillity of the present!

"I have seen my Man in Black! Do you understand? My Man in Black of the Louvre ball, the man with the red tablets, and the dozen bottles; the man who appeared to me seventy years ago. Or, rather, no, it was not he, since I am living still. But great Heaven! what a resemblance! He wore, as the first did, a black velvet coat, and breeches, carried an ebony cane, and had the great black moustache. Oh, I was ready to faint with terror. You may think me crazed, I daresay, but it is no laughing matter. Wait while I get my wits together to tell you properly.

"Madeleine de Scudéri, as you know, was taken ill at my house. When a woman is ninety-four years of age, there is no great chance of her getting better. Nevertheless, Madame de Sandwich took a coach, and drove at full speed to a quack doctor, who is very fashionable, and

who is said to have performed many wonderful cures. Presently she returned with this man. I looked up, to drop back into my chair, crying in amazement: 'It is he!—it is the devil! Oh, Heaven!—Heaven! protect me!'

"He turned to the countess.

"'What is the matter with her? Is it your invalid?' he inquired.

"'Mercy!' I cried, casting myself on my knees, 'I signed on your tablets, certainly; but I did not understand that I was selling my soul.'

"'Ah! Ah!' said he, 'you should be Mademoiselle de L'Enclos?'

"'Yes,' murmured I, in half-suffocated tones.

"'You regret having given your signature?'

"'Alas!'

"'Calm yourself; I am not the devil I seem to be; and we will come to an understanding.'

"He approached the couch of the sick woman; but during what had passed, Madeleine had breathed her last.

"'I should not have saved her,' said the Man in Black. 'Let us go into another room,' he added, turning to me; 'we will settle our little affair.'

"'Oh, dearest Countess, I implore you do not forsake me!' I cried, lifting my trembling hands to Madame de Sandwich.

"Excuse me, what I have to say must not be heard by anyone but yourself, Mademoiselle; for in that case, it would be impossible for me to arrange the bargain,' said the Man in Black.

"I was frozen with fear, and I could not put faith in his assurances. Suddenly remembering that the night before, I had received from my confessor a reliquary containing a bit of the true cross, I went for it to my cabinet, and slipped it carefully into my bosom. 'Be it so, sir,' I said to him. 'Come, I am ready to listen to you.' Be just to me, my friend. You have never known me to

be a coward. I retain all my faculties; very well, I swear to you that to be there, alone with such a companion, I had to summon all my powers of body and soul. After carefully closing the door, the Man in Black said to me: 'Mademoiselle, it is the work of an honest man I am about to accomplish. I do but ask of you to be secret upon the disclosure I am about to make to you, and I believe you to be too entirely a woman of honour to do harm to a person whose sole desire is to make things agreeable to you.'

"This preamble was sufficiently reassuring; but my horror of him was hardly less intense, and I kept the holy relic close pressed against my bosom, to ward off the influences of the spirit of evil. The Man in Black drew forward a chair for me, and seated himself on a stool beside me.

"'I am not the devil, Mademoiselle," he continued. 'I am not even the same who once had the honour of paying you a visit.'

"I trembled, but looked at him with a little less terror.

"'What, sir, you are not—'

"'No,' said he, without permitting me to finish my sentence, 'it was my father.'

"'Your father?'

"'Yes, a Portuguese Jew, who profoundly studied the art of healing. I bear him a very close resemblance, Mademoiselle.'

"'It is terrible, sir.'

"'All the more that I have been careful to wear the same clothes. The resemblance is my fortune. Countless people have been deceived as you have been; but your mistake might have grave consequences, and that is why I disabuse you.'

"I began to breathe more freely. 'But is this that you tell me really true?'

"'You still doubt? So much the better. If the most *spirituelle* woman of the century has believed in the immortality of the man, what of the others? I give myself, as you know better than anybody, for some hundred years of

age. My son, in fifty years' time, will be able to double that. I have only verbal traditions, he will have written traditions. I shall bequeath him a great number of secrets, and many family histories. It is certain that there will not be wanting many persons who, having seen me in my early life, will take him to be me, as you have taken me for my father. Only, our fortune having accumulated very largely, I shall wish him to bear a title. He will be called the Count de St Germain.'

"'I am overwhelmed with astonishment,' I said. 'And what is the use of this ruse? Why perpetuate such a resemblance from father to son?'

"'You ask me that?' he exclaimed. 'Think what renown and prestige it gives. Think of the blind confidence reposed in one who has discovered for himself the secret of not dying. Do you not know that the faith of a sick person in his physician is frequently the cause of his cure? Have regard to the moral and mental powers, and the physical ones will most surely feel the influence. You yourself are a proof of this.'

"'I?'

"'Did you not remain beautiful till you were eighty years old?'

"'That is true.'

"'Do you know what was in those bottles which were to render your beauty of such long duration? They contained pure water.'

"'Is it possible?'

"'Yes, Mademoiselle, pure water, mixed with a few drops of an innocuous chemical drug to keep it incorruptible, and to slightly colour it. The experiment succeeded. My father had no serious intention of making you think you had made a compact with the devil. Just now, in the idea that you recognised me, you received a terrible shock. Did he not say that the hour when you should see him again, you would not have three days to live?'

"'He told me so!' I replied, shuddering.

"'How old are you?'

"'Eighty-six years.'

"'Your arm, if you please.'

"I stretched it out to him; he felt my pulse.

"'Just so,' he said; 'not only will you not die in three days, but I guarantee you at least five more years, before you need to be thinking of the other world. Farewell, Mademoiselle. To complete your tranquillity and peace of mind, I will look for, and send you at once the leaf of my father's tablets on which you wrote your signature.'

"He kept his word. Before an hour had passed, I received the hateful red leaf, and my heart glowed with satisfaction.

"Here, my friend, in deepest confidence, you have the conclusion of my adventure with the devil—and of course I like it much better that way; but, alas! I see things now in a different light from those days.

"Adieu, my dear old friend. Reflect a little yourself, weigh the pros and cons of it all, and in that other world let us hope we shall not be separated. NINON."

THE END